

An Evening of Spirit Theatre

Dedicated to the memory of Jack Sutherland,
magician, mentor, partner and lifelong friend.

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FOREWORD (from original edition)

In March of 1987, Jack Sutherland and I began a conversation which led to one of the longest-running commercial seances ever produced. Having just completed relocating Sun Magic (of Phoenix, Arizona) to a newer, larger commercial location we were searching for a use for a still empty portion of the building. Jack suggested the idea of a permanent séance room and I offered to design the show and to perform the role of the Medium. Thus was born the idea of "...the Ultimate Seance."

When the need was felt for a publicist, media maven, and deeper pockets, Craig Nichols was invited into the partnership. He brought to the mix an unjaundiced enthusiasm and a "producer's touch" which balanced my creative frenzy with the realities of cash flow. We formed the perfect symbiotic team, countering and balancing each other, pulling and tugging, advocating and arguing; both with the common goal of producing the finest séance ever performed.

"Manifestations...the Ultimate Seance" opened in June 1987, first on Thursday evenings only, then expanding to weekends, and finally to two-and-three-a-night performances during the hectic Hallowe'en seasons. Early in the run we added Barry Schor to the performing cast, as the Butler. His presence added class and compassion. The show has "trod the boards" for two years, making it the longest-running theatrical production in Arizona history. Now, with the publication of this package, and after hundreds of performances, the show goes "dark" for the final time.

What is the secret of success for "Manifestations?" It is not in the pieces performed during the show. Neither is it in the decor, the promotion, the characterization, or the persistence of its producers (although all of the above were prime ingredients in the recipe). The simple secret was an uncompromising determination to make the show something special; an event which the guests will remember for the rest of their lives.

In sharing the story of "Manifestations...the Ultimate Séance", we are passing the torch to you. Learn from our mistakes and profit from our experiences. There are easier ways to make a buck, but none more fulfilling. If you maintain respect for your art, your craft, and your audiences...séance entertainment can be real magic!

Pleasant dreams,

Lee Earle



TEN YEARS LATER – I reflect upon the experience with fond nostalgia. In many ways, it was the pivot around which my career as a performer swung, pointing me in an entirely new direction. I can say without fear of successful contradiction that **Manifestions – The Ultimate Séance** changed my life.

Séance has a way of teaching a new kind of respect for audiences, one which requires an altogether different approach to this unique style of entertainment. Before Manifestations, my performing persona was brash, cutting, and irreverent. After a couple hundred performances in the 13th chair, all that survives is the irreverence - and even that is tempered with a great deal more empathy than before.

Manifestations was the workbench upon which I hammered out my improved performing style, each night perfecting another nuance of word, gesture, or pause until the whole became greater than the sum of its parts.

The years of experience with that production served another purpose as well; they became my curriculum vitae, easing my entry into a new, exciting group of peers, many of whom have become lifelong friends.

Séance provided the sure and certain knowledge that the only way to touch an audience is through their emotions. Once you achieve this marvelous rapport with a séance audience, you'll never settle for anything less again.

Entrepreneurs in distant cities have used **Manifestations** as a pattern to craft their own séances – some just for fun, others with commercial intent. All are testimony to the appeal and power of this intimate theatrical offering..

This second, expanded edition of **Manifestations – The Ultimate Séance** has found its way into print for multiple reasons - the first being the incredible welcome the original limited edition received. I am also motivated by the desire to get more on the record; as the years pass and memories fade, I realize that it's either now or never. A third purpose is that of encouragement - if more performers are persuaded to add séance to their repertoires then this magnificent performance venue will continue to provide thrills, chills, screams, dreams, and vivid entertainment experiences not otherwise available.

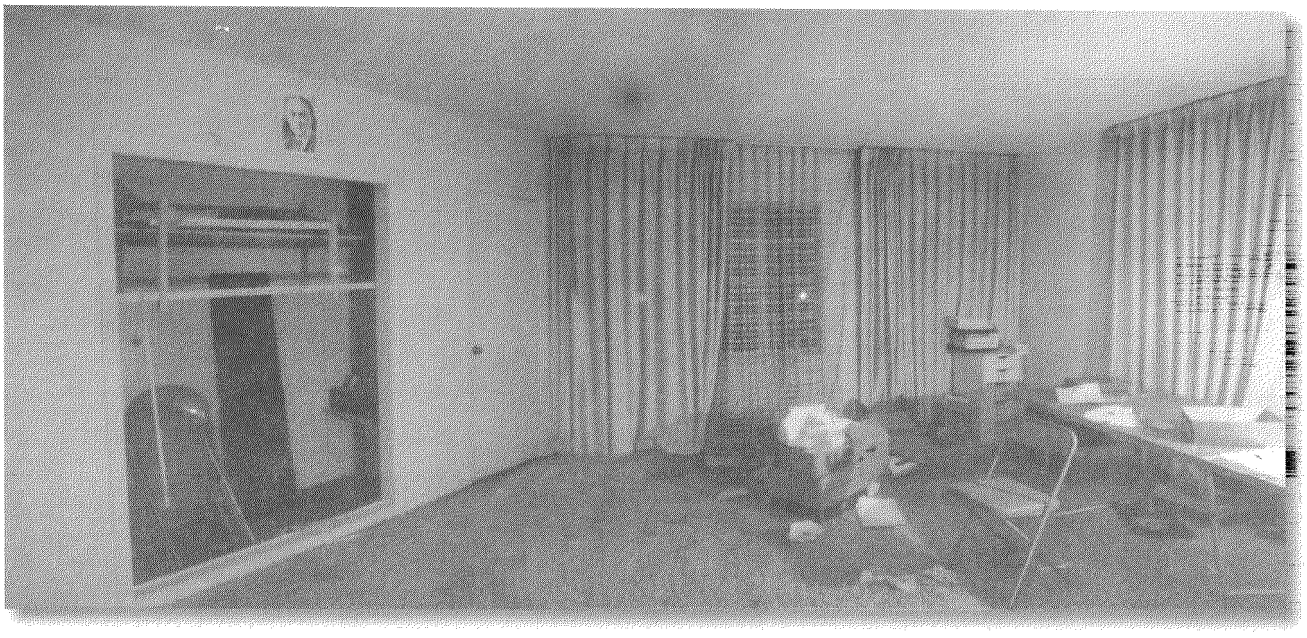
You're encouraged to explore the realm of spirit theatre - and change *your* life.



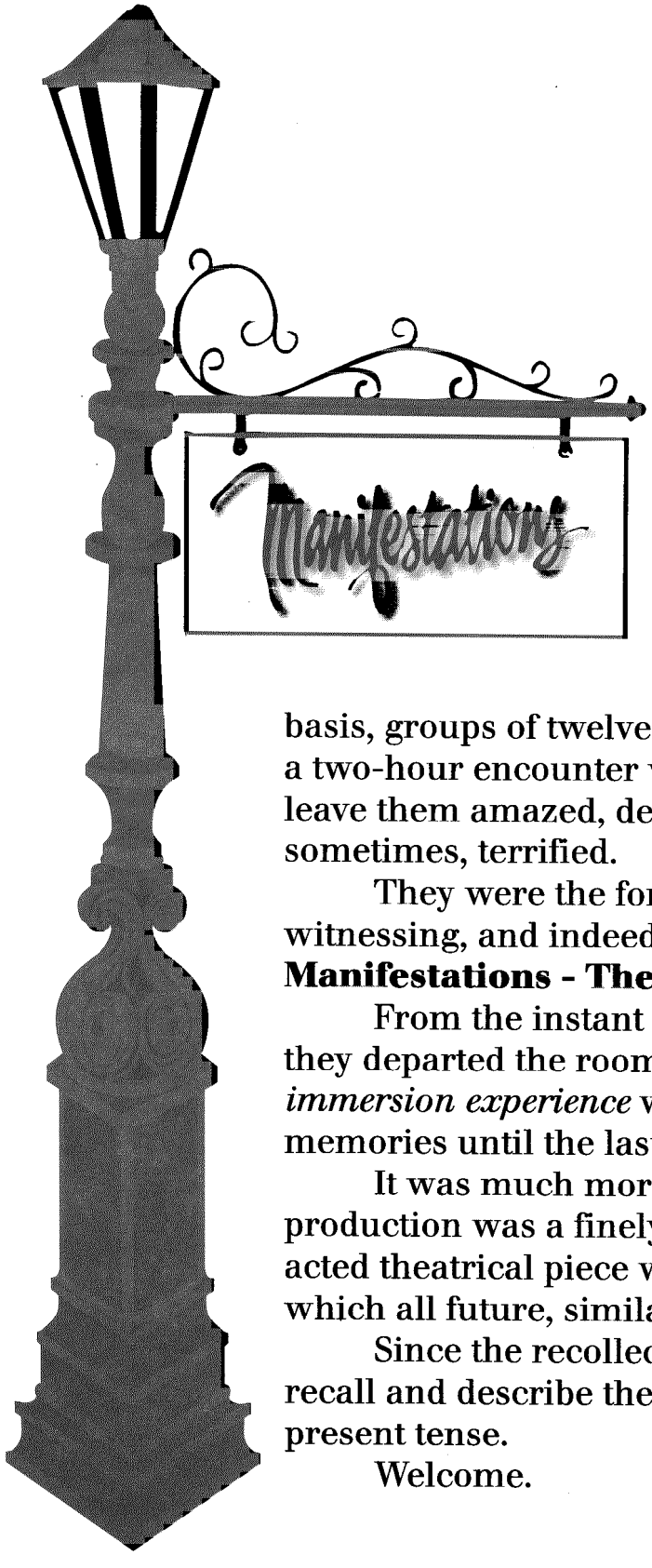
Lee Earle
Phoenix, 1999

Editor's note:

The companion audio tapes to this book are unchanged from the original 1991 release. They may contain references to certain items (business cards, tickets, flyers, and other promotional materials) which were bound into the original edition. Because no more of those items exist, they could not be included in their original form.



This page had the only space available in which to insert this last-minute, stop-the-presses photo which came to light while the book was already in production. This panorama shows the séance room very early on, with a frame nailed in the door of the unmodified closet to simulate the secret opening which would be installed later. The portrait over the closet door is evidence that Houdini's spirit was already with us.



Séance is a unique form of entertainment which plays to the fantasy that communication with the spirits of the dead is not only possible but can be scheduled at 7:00 PM and 9:30 PM every evening.

September of 1986 saw the premiere performance of our successful, freestanding commercial séance. For almost three years, a converted bedroom in a small home in Phoenix, Arizona provided a form of entertainment which drew attendees from around the country. On a regular basis, groups of twelve guests would convene around a table for a two-hour encounter with their imaginations which would leave them amazed, delighted, frightened, intrigued, and, sometimes, terrified.

They were the fortunate few who had the privilege of witnessing, and indeed participating in, a live performance of **Manifestations - The Ultimate Séance**.

From the instant our guests arrived until the moment they departed the room, they were involved in a *total immersion experience* which will remain vividly in their memories until the last moment they draw breath.

It was much more than a "magic show in the dark." Our production was a finely crafted, psychologically tuned, and well acted theatrical piece which made for itself a reputation against which all future, similar efforts will be compared,

Since the recollections are still so very real to me, I shall recall and describe the events as I experienced them – in the present tense.

Welcome.

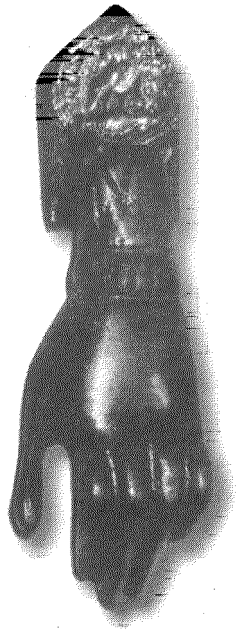
Act I: The Guests Arrive

Every evening's performances begin, not in the séance room proper, but in our guests' hands and minds. Often, each attendee bears an "engraved" invitation, listing the date, time, and place of the gathering, along with some directions to help find our off-the-beaten-path location. Occasionally we'll go all out for special groups chauffeuring them from hotel to restaurant to séance room in a package deal benefitting both restaurant and Manifestations.



Even for our non-VIP guests, we feel it is supremely important that their first impressions set the tone for the remainder of the evening.

In most cases, our guests arrive in the evening - after dark. The first thing seen as they approach the building from our spacious parking lot is the garden path, an apt metaphor for where we are about to lead them. They are on *our* turf; their reality is about to be subject to our whims.



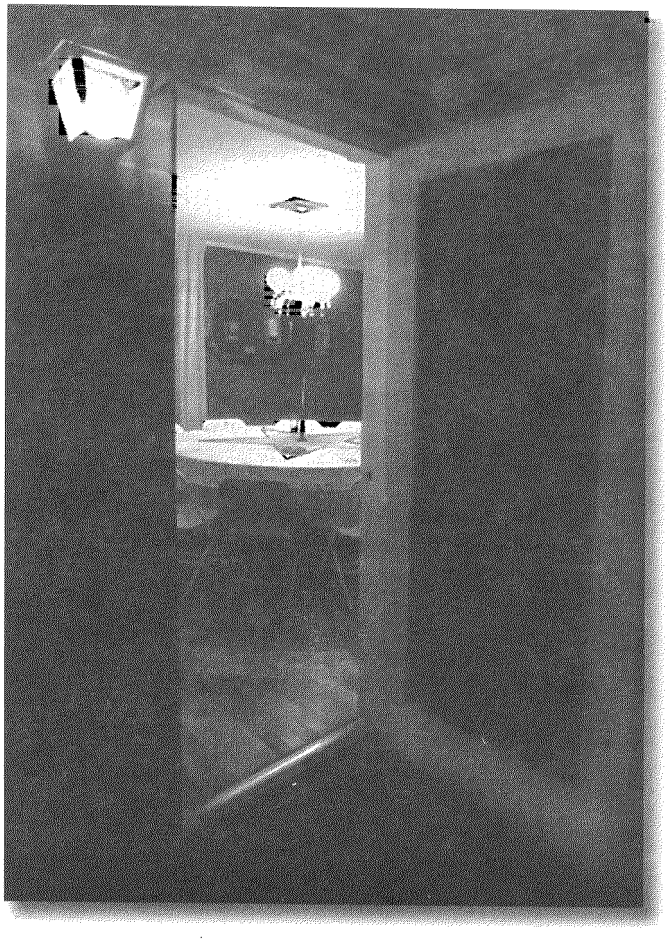
Their invitations include instructions to proceed down the path and knock on the door to gain admittance. At the far end of the path hangs a bamboo curtain masking the rear entrance to the magic shop which occupies the remainder of the converted three bedroom house. (Historians should note that this is the house which actor-to-be Nick Nolte spent his childhood.) The door to the séance room proper, not visible in

this photo, is easy to find because it, too, is illuminated by a coachlamp style porch light.

The sharp report of the door knocker, a disembodied hand in antiqued brass, raps startlingly loud in the quiet semidarkness, yet another clue to our production values and motivations; the apprehension begins to build right away.

They have no idea that the Medium silently stands behind that bamboo curtain, observing the guests and listening to their nervous comments to one another, gleaning information which can be used to his advantage later in the performance.

The Butler, after just enough delay to make the guests slightly edgy, finally opens the door. His first act, rather than one of overt welcome, is to check each bearer's invitation. That formality accomplished, and if all documentation is in order, he stands aside, bids the guests welcome, and beckons them to step into our parlor.



The room's decor is as elegant as possible, given our restrictions of time, space, and budget. The first major touch of ambience (and expense) is the hardwood floor in polished red oak. When it was installed, the carpenter just couldn't understand why we weren't upset that a few squeaks remained in the planks.

Dark red walls, ivory trim, and Victorian knickknacks everywhere present an abundance of studied ambience for the entering visitors. Period artworks and photographs adorn the walls, along with a large (and quite heavy) gilt-framed mirror. One corner of the room is occupied by a wind-up, hand cranked Victrola upon which sits an enormous crystal ball. Against the

opposite wall is seen a bar containing the evening's beverages – as well as a supply of thin-stemmed wine glasses (flutes).



The only concessions to modern times are the chairs, and there are a couple of reasons for that decision. Finding a matching set of twelve suitable antique chairs is not the easiest task and, after one woman's reaction left the surface of her seat a bit moist following a particularly effective dark sequence, it didn't seem to be a good idea to continue in our quest for expensive Victorian upholstery.

The guests are always surprised when the Butler escorts them to their seats because, with very few exceptions, couples who come together are never allowed to be seated adjacent one another. This procedure provides not only a way to continue working on their nerves but also serves as a precaution against potential cooperative disruptions.



Photo credit: Pat Holcombe

We are rather rigid about our starting times and take a great deal of trouble to remind our guests well in advance that the doors will close and remain that way once the séance begins promptly on schedule. Guests are seldom late to arrive.

As our visitors are seated, the Butler takes their wraps and pours for each guest his or her choice of wine, mineral water, or sparkling grape juice. That duty accomplished, he sets about preparing the audience for the evening's activities.

Reading aloud from a letter "written by the previous owner of the property," the Butler describes strange noises and unexplainable phenomena heard and observed around and within the house. The audience is left with the impression that all may not be well in this room.

In addition, the Butler circulates among the guests a sheet of paper on a clipboard, requesting each person to affix his or her signature. (You can see the sign-in sheet on the table directly in front of the standing medium in the photo.) This paper will play a part, much later in the evening, as evidence of a quirky spirit's presence.

A single small, napkin-lined wicker basket, of the type often used for dinner rolls, is offered by the Butler to each guest as a repository for a personal item from pocket or purse. After twelve objects have been collected, the napkin is folded in a manner to conceal the contents within it. These items, the Butler explains, will later be used as the focus for psychometric revelations. Placing the basket near the Medium's place at the table, he sidesteps any further questions.

As you can see from the photos, once all the seats around the table are occupied, there isn't much room left in which to maneuver. This is actually a serendipitous bonus.

First photo:
Patsy Lowry
Lee Earle (standing)
June Horowitz
Sam Horowitz
Ed Morrison
Bill Andrews
Donna Patterson

Second Photo:
Ken Klosterman
June Horowitz
Sam Horowitz
Ed Morrison
Bill Andrwes
Donna Patterson
Robert Bluemle
Len Vintus

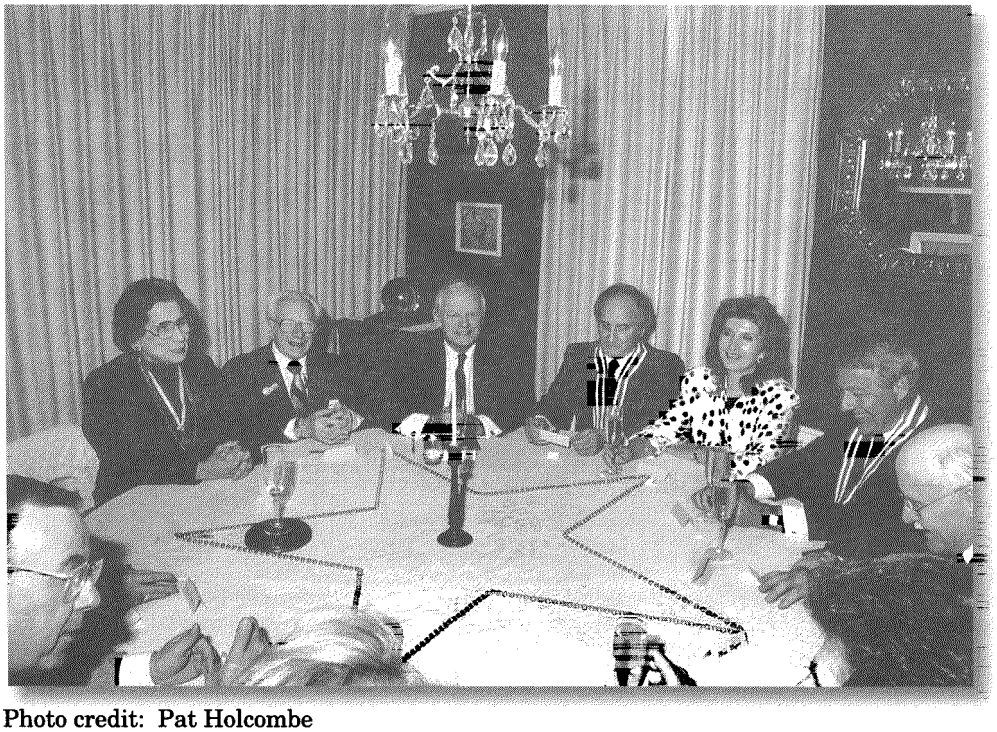


Photo credit: Pat Holcombe



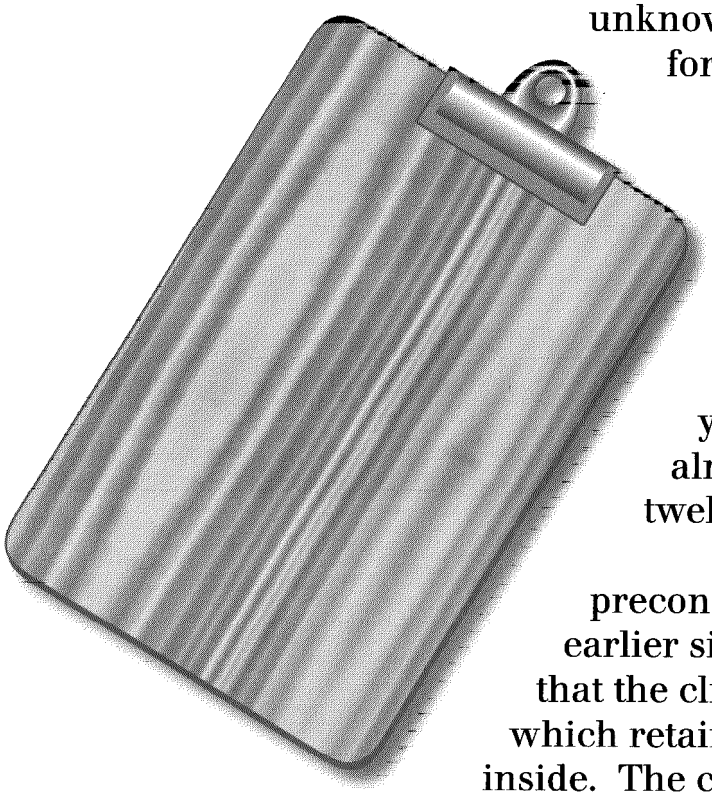
Having realized how crowded the room is with a dozen people seated around the table, we play to that reality for a greater purpose. Both the Butler and the Medium will move to every quadrant of the room, squeezing through the narrow straits between table and walls in a manner which will later serve to remind guests how completely impossible it would be for a person to maneuver around the room in the total darkness.

As personal items are being collected and signatures serially collected on the clipboard's paper, the guests are reminded of the focus for the evening's spirit contact – all eyes are guided to the portrait of Harry Houdini above the shelf on the wall.



A casual observation of the walls, shelves, and assorted parahernalia would lead one to believe the room is a shrine to the legendary spirit investigator; biographies line the bookshelves and, displayed in a frame hung above the bar, is a set of his handcuffs.

The crocheted tablecloth serves a greater purpose than mere set dressing. Our guests will soon write, on little parchment squares, questions for the Medium to ask of the spirits. Because the lace prevents placement of the papers on the table for writing, a dozen small clipboards, not



unknown in post-Victorian times, are on hand for our guests' convenience.

The papers bearing the guests' questions, suggests the Butler, should be retained on their persons until the Medium asks to read them shortly before entering the Dark séance. Strange, but the Medium never gets around to collecting any questions and yet the reincarnated spirit of Houdini almost always manages to answer all twelve, usually in exacting detail.

Of course the guests, partially preconditioned to the use of a clipboard by the earlier signature sheet, have no way of knowing that the clipboards are actually devious devices which retain secret carbon copies of their questions inside. The clipboards are delivered to the Medium, still out of sight in another part of the house, as the Butler goes about his duties.

Each question, after being retrieved from within its clipboard, is memorized by the Medium. Those which request that the spirits supply facts or figures specific to Houdini's era are given special consideration; a library of reference works is available for quick research.

Once the clipboard data is assimilated, the Medium positions himself outside the door to the parlor and awaits the signal that all is ready for his entrance. He focuses on the small optic peephole in the door, glowing with the light from the room's chandelier. His cue will be when it winks out, covered with a small disc by the Butler as he once again checks to see if the Medium has arrived.

A slow count to twenty assures the Butler will have completed his verbal overture, the Medium steps to the door, and thumps it loudly with the head of his cane. There is always a startled gasp from one or more of the guests.

The Medium enters...

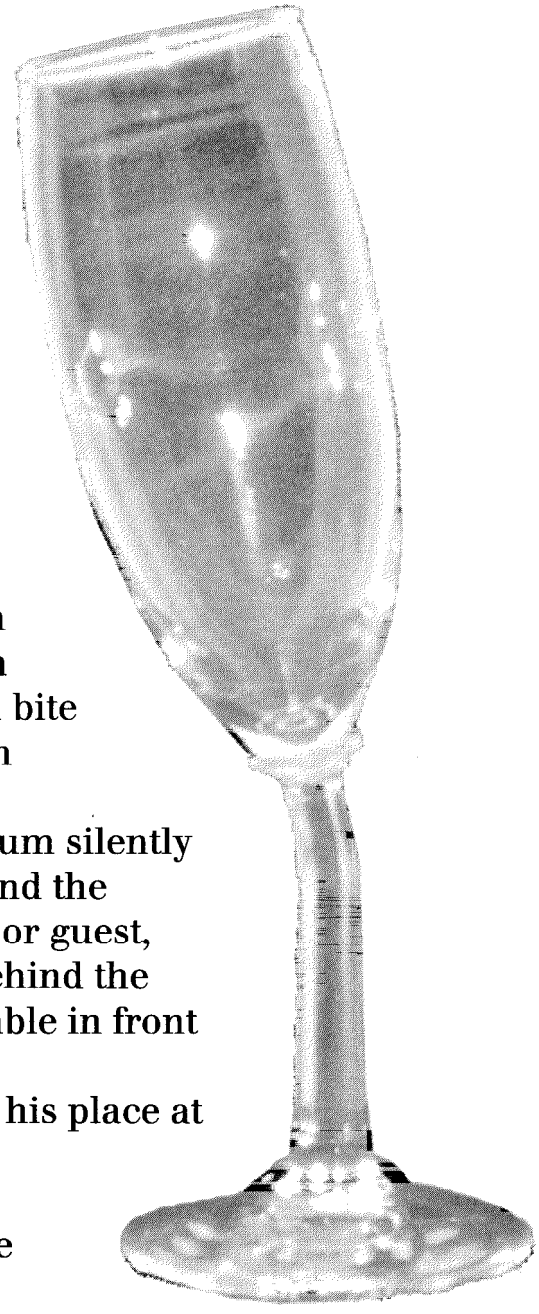
When the door is opened, the visitors see only a backlighted silhouette of a man in a snap-brim fedora carrying a small box under one arm and holding a walking stick in the other. He steps into the room's rosy glow and bids the assembled guests, "Good evening."

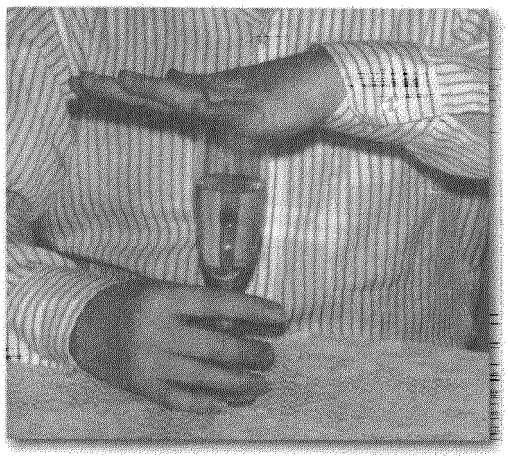
Spinning his hat diagonally across the room to land unerringly on one of the coat tree's upper horns, he leans his cane into a secure spot near the telephone cubby and turns to address the guests, "You are here to participate in an authentic recreation of a Victorian spirit séance; an attempt to communicate with the spirits of the dear departed. Be careful what you wish for," he smiles sardonically, "you may get it."

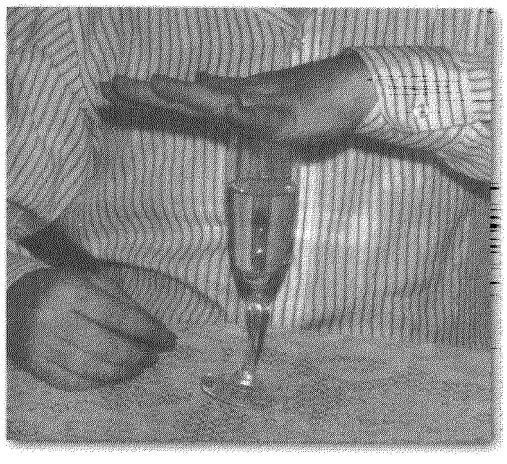
He continues to set his intimidating tone for the evening with a small demonstration of psychic mojo. Silently shifting his gaze from one person to another, he opens the rosewood box which he holds and removes several mysterious items, placing them neatly in a row on the table; a small kerchief, a cloth bundle tied with satin cord, and a Hershey's Kiss – a bite size morsel of chocolate wrapped in a square of thin aluminum foil.

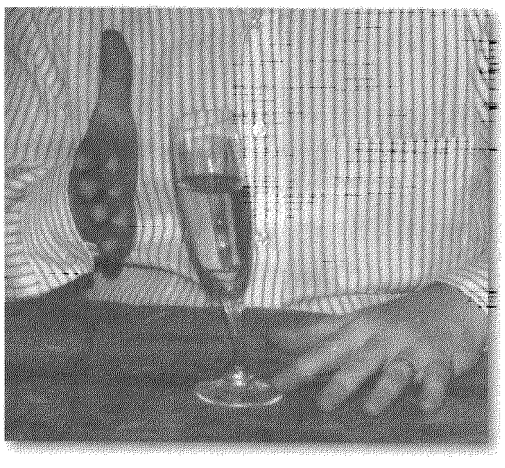
During these nonverbal moments, as the Medium silently builds the tension, the Butler refills the glasses around the table. Rather than risk spilling wine on either table or guest, he lifts each glass away from the table and stands behind the guest as he pours, replacing a refilled glass on the table in front of each respective guest.

Just before the Medium's glass – which marks his place at the table, displayed on a low, mahogany pedestal (visible in some of the earlier photos) – is similarly filled, he unwraps and consumes that little chocolate tidbit. As the Butler attempts to place the Medium's









filled glass on the table, the moving glass is intercepted and the Medium takes it directly, immediately taking a sip. The combination of sweet chocolate and dry Chablis elicits an interesting expression on the Medium's face and produces a multisensory moment with which every person at the table can identify.

In fact, the Butler has exchanged the Medium's original flute for one with a slightly bent stem which cannot sit unnoticed on the table. The angled stem is concealed behind the Medium's fingers as he holds the glass to sip from it. The strong, vicarious conflict between chocolate and dry wine which the guests experience will push from their consciousness the memory that the Medium's glass was ever out of sight.

Following an appropriate buildup, the small square of aluminum foil (the wrapper from the chocolate) is rolled into a tiny pellet and deposited in one of the guests' hands. After a few seconds – and some appropriate gestures and grimaces from the Medium – the tiny metallic ball gets really hot. Hot enough to burn, if it were held in the hand for long.

They never hold it.

The heating is accomplished with an invisible chemical which the Medium applies to a fingertip shortly before making his entrance (*mercuric chloride*, if you must know, a dangerous compound which must be treated with the utmost respect). He secretly introduces the reagent merely by touching the chemically treated fingertip to the foil as it is rolled up into a ball. A droplet of liquid from the Medium's wineglass supplies the moisture to trigger the astonishingly exothermic reaction.

Dismissing this first manifestation as a "simple, psychic parlor stunt of no real value..." the

Medium takes his seat, adjusts his chair closer to the table, and slides his wineglass (stem still concealed by his fingers) forward on the tablecloth to become the center of focus among the thirteen present.

Gesturing in a manner similar to when he encouraged the foil pellet to heat, he mutters an unintelligible incantation under his breath and places his free hand atop the glass. He grips the rim with his palm and seems to be coaxing the glass, first in one direction and then another. The audience hears a small sizzling hiss (a ventriloquial illusion). He pulls away his lower hand (which was around the stem) as if in an instinctive reaction to pain.

Then he places a single finger on the base of the glass to steady it, removes his other hand from the rim of the glass, and slowly rotates the glass in place so the twelve others will notice that the stem of his glass is now angled at least 10 degrees from the vertical!

There is silence around the table as each guest realizes, first in surprise, next in incredulity, and finally in resignation that they have been witness to an impossibility. Some, whether in anticipation or doubt, surreptitiously test the stems of their own glasses. For the next thirty seconds, nothing else matters.

We have begun to challenge their realities.

Psychometric Readings

Throughout the evening, the Medum weaves a verbal tapestry of history, biography, and legend around the various manifestations of spirit, slowly introducing the thin end of a wedge of belief into each guest's consciousness. Central to purging the lingering doubts which some may have brought to the table, the Medium next conducts a session of psychometry.

He lifts from the wicker basket the napkin containing the diverse personal objects and, with exaggerated care, rolls them into view on the table before him. (Feedback from earlier performances taught us that the otherwise devastatingly

accurate personal psychometric readings could be discounted because some patrons thought that the owner's identity was betrayed due to each item's position in the basket. The tumbling of the items silently reassures that no clue of that sort can survive the mixing.)

"For those who invest belief in these things," begins the Medium, "each of us has within us a source of energy – chakra, chi, spirit, soul – which radiates an aura surrounding the body in a three-dimensional halo. Each aura is as unique to the spirit as fingerprints are to the body. Every aura is different. Just as a needle rubbed on a magnet will absorb and then reradiate that magnetic field, likewise a personal object – a keepsake, memento, souvenir, or good luck charm – can accept transfer of the owner's aura. Those secondary auras speak volumes about their original sources."

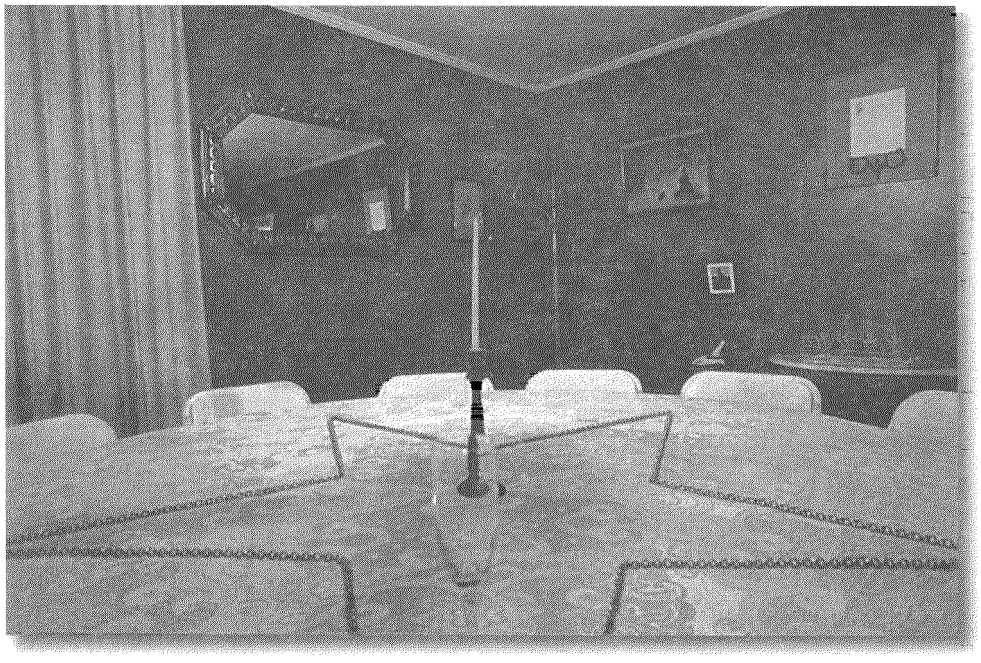
The Medium picks up one item and looks closely at it, shielding his eyes from the glare of the chandelier. Sometimes he lowers his chin to gaze at the object over the top of his spectacles. And then the readings begin.

Every personal item is viewed and analyzed and each owner's personality is described – first in general terms and then in narrowed specifics. The Medium sees in the auras future travel plans, past business failures, current children's names, and often outlines the very concerns facing the item's owner. To conclude, and conclusively validate, each reading, the Medium unerringly returns the item to the person from whom it came.

These psychometric readings were drawn, for the most part, from the pages of The Collected Writings and Other Works of William Larsen, Sr., a fabulous resource. Amplifying those readings were factual inserts garnered from many sources; concierges from the resort hotels at which the guests were staying, friends or associates who were encouraged to gossip while booking séance seats, and conversations overheard from behind that bamboo curtain.

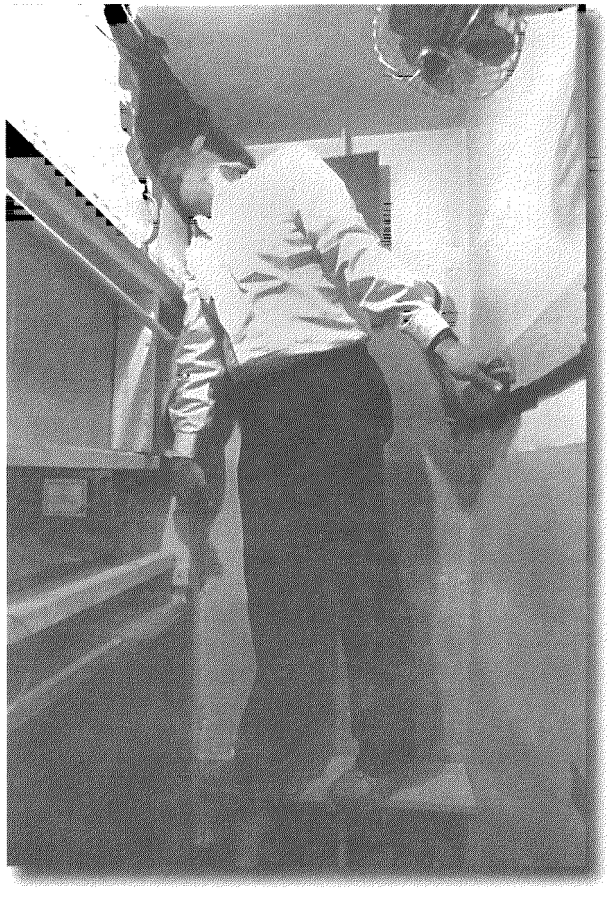
Never was the information revealed directly; its impact was far greater when approached tangentially. We learned that

one guest, for example, was about to embark on a long-awaited pilgrimage to the Holy Land; the Medium saw visions of small papers, bearing wishes or prayers, folded and tucked between stones in an ancient wall and asked if that image made sense to the guest. (What Jew doesn't visit the Wailing Wall when given the opportunity?) We only knew he was booked on a flight to Israel and took a logical leap of faith. The look on Mr. Rosen's face was one of astounded shock.

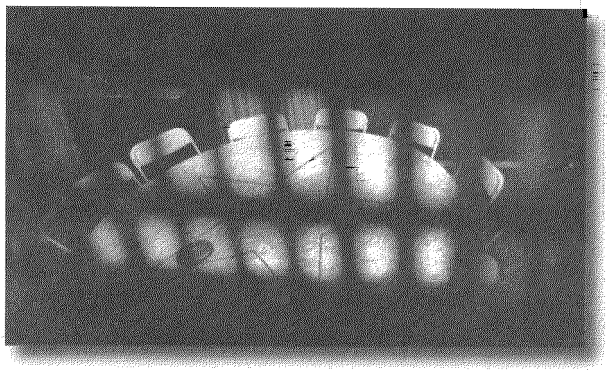


As was mentioned before, the return of each item to its owner was a silent testimony of the reading's accuracy. Obviously, there must be some way of determining which item belongs to whom. As opposed to most methods which involve marked containers such as envelopes, sacks, bags, etc., we decided to go for a far less formal-appearing procedure.

The photo of the séance table (taken from the Medium's position - the wineglass is in the foreground) shows a two small dots within the reflected grillework in the upper right corner of the mirror. We hid a set of tiny colored lights inside the air conditioning ductwork; lights which are so narrowly focused that if the Medium were to change position by only six inches to either side, they would not be visible. Various combinations

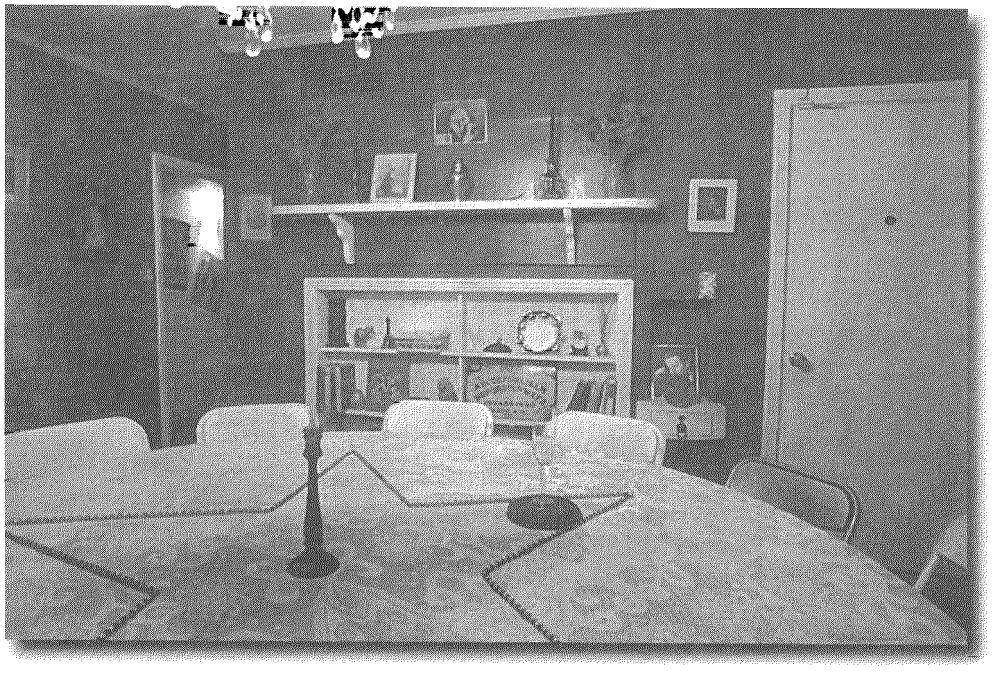


of these lights conform to a number system which pinpoint the item's owner. As the Medium examines each item at arm's length, his gaze is focused on the reflection of those lights in the mirror.



The Butler, backstage in "the Booth", looks on through a fake air conditioning vent (near the ceiling, above the candle in the lower photo) to observe the objects as the Medium holds them up in the light. As he identifies each one, switches are toggled which activate the coding lights.

The upper photo is a "Butler's-eye view" of the table through the grille. The bottom photo on page 16 shows him in position, eyes looking through the grille, hand on the light switches.



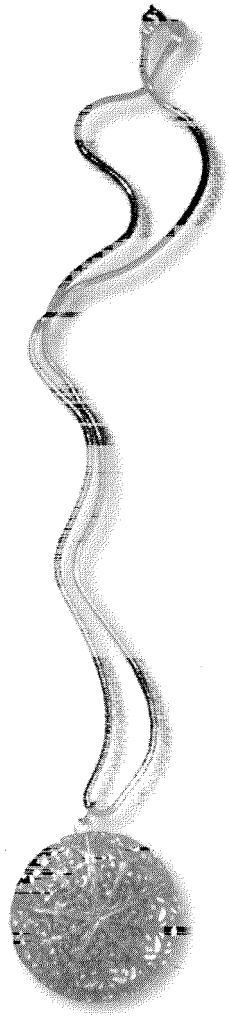
When collecting the psychometric items, the Butler simply makes a mental note of each personal possession as it goes into the basket and mnemonically associates the item with the owner's seat number.

Act II: Spirit Trilogy

The audience has now been conditioned by the heating & bending to expect the unusual. The psychometric segment has opened their minds to the possibility of other-than-spoken communication. Now, the spirits get their turn in a hard-hitting combination of three standard spooky effects.

A Living & Dead divination is always appropriate in any repertoire of classic séance presentations.

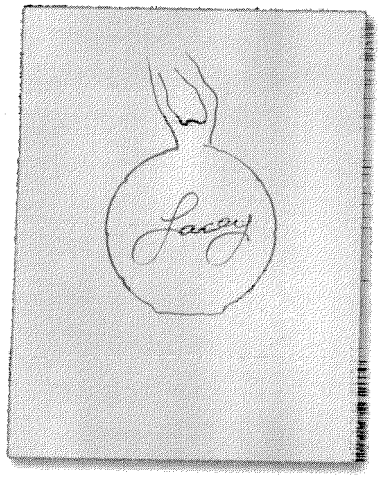
Small squares of parchment (the same as those upon which they penned their questions for the spirits) are placed before one of those at the table. "I'm certain," suggests the Medium, "that you can bring to mind the name of someone who is no longer of this earth - who is in that place the Victorians so colorfully referred to as 'the Summerland'. Not a famous person, please, but instead, someone you may have known personally. Without allowing anyone at the table to see, please write that person's given name on one of those papers. Then place the paper face down on the table."



Once those instructions have been followed, the Medium continues, "On the remaining five or six papers, and in a manner identical to the previous name, please write the first names of persons you know to be among the living. Again, none of us at the table should be privy to your writing."

When all the papers bear names, the participant is instructed further, "Please mix the papers so that when they are turned writing-side-up none of us will have a clue as to which is the name of the dear departed. Then place the papers in a straight row from your left to your right."

"Are you familiar with the technique of pendulum?" asks the Medium, picking up the locket formerly removed from the rosewood box, "Midwives throughout the ages have used this process to learn the sex of babies still in the womb, dowsers employ it to find underground water, and psychics find it useful as an oracle for interpreting messages from the spirits. That capability can serve us well this evening."



Using the locket as a template, he traces a circle in the center of the paper and hands the paper to the participant across the table. "A second time," requests the Medium, "please write the first name of the dear departed, then fold the paper twice to keep the name in darkness."

The Medium continues, "A pendulum works best when a personal, aura bearing item serves as the weight at the bottom. Since we lack a possession which may have

belonged to the deceased, a ceremonial substitute will have to serve. Would you pass the folded parchment to me, please? Those of you who pass it along are invited to reassure the others that no trace of the writing within can be detected. They'll wonder about that later."

Turning his attention to the folded parchment, the Medium says, "Your dear one's name folded within this paper serves as a re-embodiment of the spirit, as it were. Tearing it into tiny scraps represents - again - the loss of the physical body, the mortal coil. It's appropriate to cremate the remains." The folded parchment is torn into tiny pieces.

The Medium opens the small drawer beneath the telephone cubby in the wall and removes an ornate, round brass ashtray. He turns over the low, wooden pedestal (which once displayed his empty wineglass) to reveal a fitted recess in which he places the circle of brass. The folded parchment is set aflame and dropped in the center of the ashtray.

As the pieces are being consumed in the flames, the setup for the second part of the triad - inspired by Eugene Burger's Spirit Theatre - begins.

To the person directly at his right, he says, "You were the last person to touch the folded paper. Hold both of your hands out, palm down." The participant complies.

"No," corrects the Medium, moving the helper's hands up a few millimeters, "a little higher - and make fists. Are you right handed or left handed?" The participant replies, "Right handed."

"I suspected as much," the Medium replies, sliding the rosewood box into place directly below the fists, "so drop your left hand into your lap and place your right fist upon this - altar." He pauses for effect, and continues wryly, "Thus, 'altaring' your hand." Once the closed hand is atop the box, the kerchief is draped over it.

"Under no circumstances are you to move or open your hand," advises the Medium. "Is that clear? Good."

Returning to the ashes, the Medium places as much of the burned parchment as possible inside the opened locket,

claiming that the spirit of the departed will soon exert its influence.

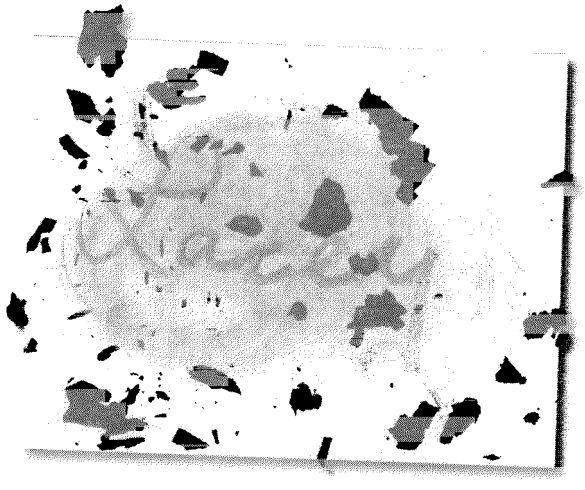
He steps around the table to stand behind the person who wrote the name and places the locket's chain in her hand with instructions to dangle the locket, pendulum style, over each name in turn. "Over those names which represent living, breathing souls," he explains, "the pendulum will move. It may be a swinging motion, a vibration, or an oscillation, but it *will* move. When above the name of the deceased..." He shrugs as if the corollary is obvious.

One by one the participant 'pendulizes' the papers and over each in turn, the pendulum swings. Only when held over one name does the locket remain stock still – motionless. That name is acknowledged as belonging to the dear departed.

Depending on the relationship of the participant to the departed, this can be a very emotional moment. We've had people break down and sob at this point, not our intention by the way, but an indication that séance can touch the heart.

Retrieving the locket, the Medium returns to his seat and takes yet another piece of parchment from the drawer. He removes the kerchief from over the second participant's fist and spreads it on the table before him. The sheet of parchment is placed in the center of the spread kerchief.

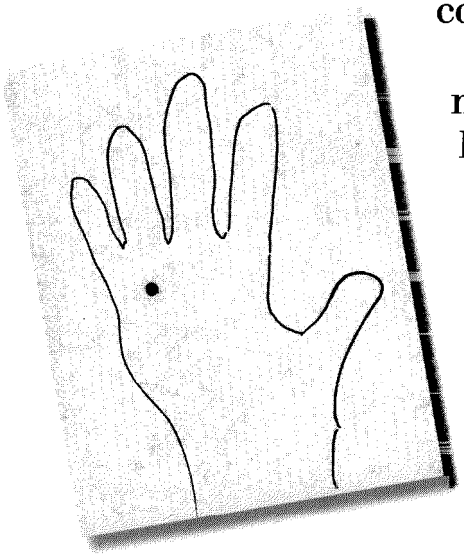
"Let's see if that movement was human-induced, spirit contact, or coincidence," remarks the Medium. He opens the locket and empties the ashes onto the parchment. "Your spirit's name is Lacey, correct? (The first helper nods in agreement) Lacey, are you with us now, give us a sign." He rubs the ashes in a circular motion on the parchment and slowly, visibly, a portion of the paper begins to darken with the rubbed ashes until it is recognized as the handwritten name, Lacey.



This one gets audible gasps around the table.

Finally, the Medium turns to the participant still holding her fist closed. "Let's see if Lacey will come to you," he smiles.

"Are you possessed? Of a good imagination, I mean. You are? Excellent! Use it to stay focused on something cool or ice cold. If you do, I promise this probably won't hurt."



Turning over the paper bearing the ash-rubbed name, he draws an open hand. Next, he takes the lighted stick of incense burning on a nearby shelf and – after soto voce muttering which sounds much like a mysterious incantation – he touches the incense to the paper, burning a small hole in the drawn palm, near the base of the ring finger.

Addressing the person whose fist is still closed, he asks, "Did you feel anything? No? You'll feel something soon. Open your hand, palm toward the center of the table."

Someone always screams.

On the participant's hand, in the exact same spot as the burn on the paper's 'hand' is a small, black smudge! "In the trade," grins the Medium, "those marks are known as 'stigmata'. Usually, they don't bleed." She is offered a damp towel to wipe her hand clean.

The methods behind the trilogy are pretty simple. The pendulum works itself most of the time. Truly. I won't go into the physiology or psychology here, but essentially the participant's own minute muscular responses make the pendulum swing or stay still.

Failing that, we do have a fallback. I always choose the person seated directly in line with the outflow from the air conditioning vent; the pendulum will inevitably move in the airstream. When it's held over the dead name, I shift position to observe, thereby blocking the air flow. As a third option, I stand with my hip against the table. Because I have instructed the participant to place her elbow on the table when holding the pendulum, a little subtle pressure against the table will ensure movement is induced in the suspended locket.

Recognizing the dead name is easy. The helper is provided an extra sharp, very soft leaded pencil so only the first name written will have a fine initial stroke.

I'm sure you've spotted the hoary "Ashes in the Palm" for what it is. In correcting the helper's hand position, a smudge of ash (obtained from the candle-blackened bottom of the brass ashtray) is touched in place. The rest is presentation.

As for the name appearing in script on the ash-rubbed parchment, it's similar to the ancient "Ashes on the Arm". In the classic version, one would write a design or symbol in soft soap on the skin of the forearm and the rubbed ashes would stick to the soap. In our version, it was clear wax (an old candle - we had plenty) which left the invisible trail. The writing is accomplished by the Butler, now backstage.

A standard center-tear technique is used when shredding the folded parchment . When I get the ashtray from the drawer I leave behind the torn center bearing the written name. In "the Booth" on the other side of the wall, the Butler retrieves the folded center, reads the name, and writes that name, in wax, on a piece of parchment which is returned to the top of the stack of papers in the drawer. Neat, huh?

Backstage: The Booth

Having made reference to "the Booth", it's appropriate to explain further.

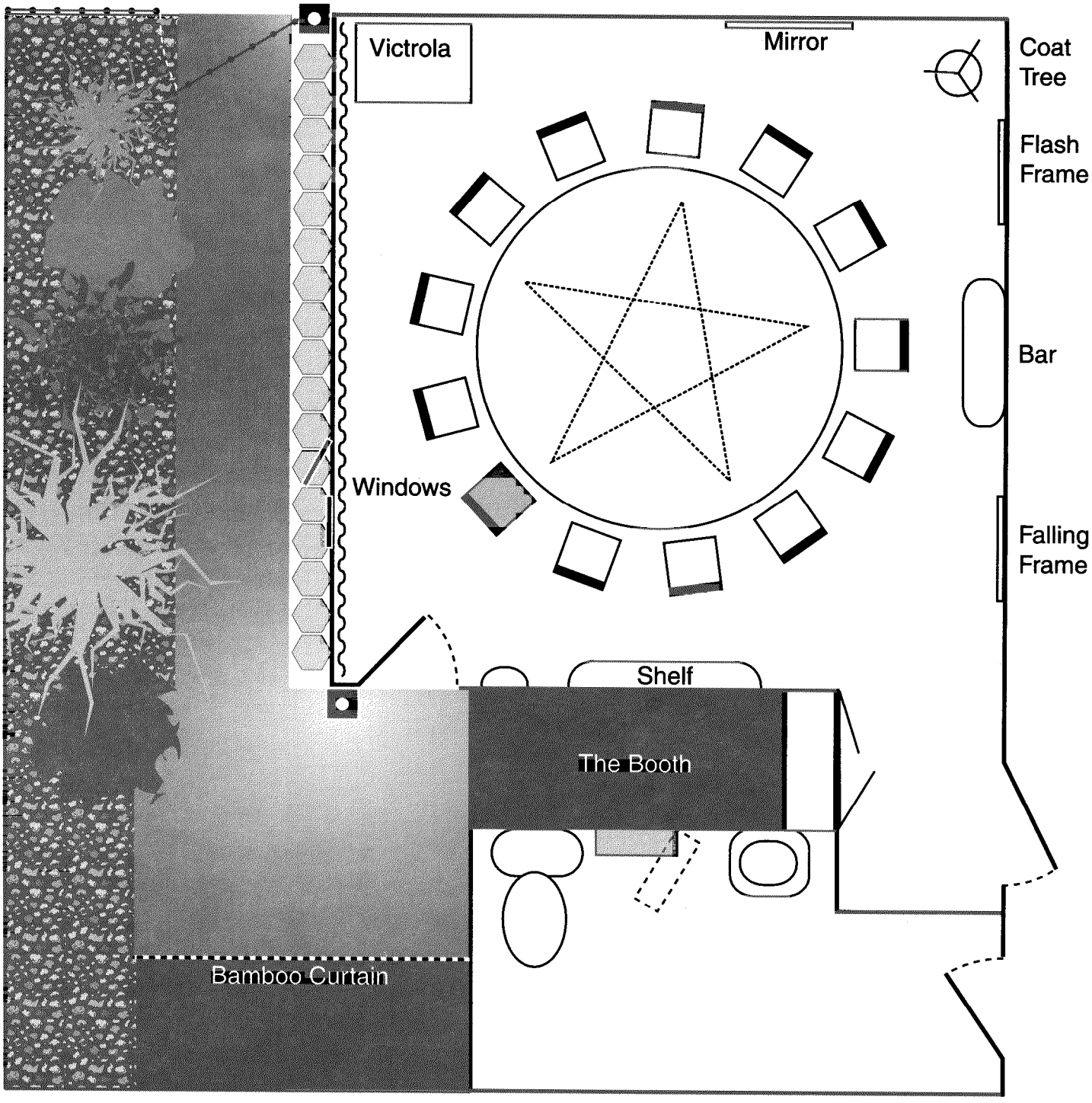
In our initial planning stages, we wanted to expand the experience for our guests by giving the Medium some additional help in the darkness. The small size of the room and the physical layout made surreptitious entry impossible so we settled for the next best alternative; partial access.

The room in which the séance occurs was formerly the master bedroom in the three bedroom house. We decided to seal off the double-door closet in order to convert it into a backstage control room for our special effects.

The first challenge was to determine how to gain access once we walled off the closet's doorway. One end of the closet was against an outside brick wall. No chance there. The other end of the space abutted a built-in set of floor-to-ceiling

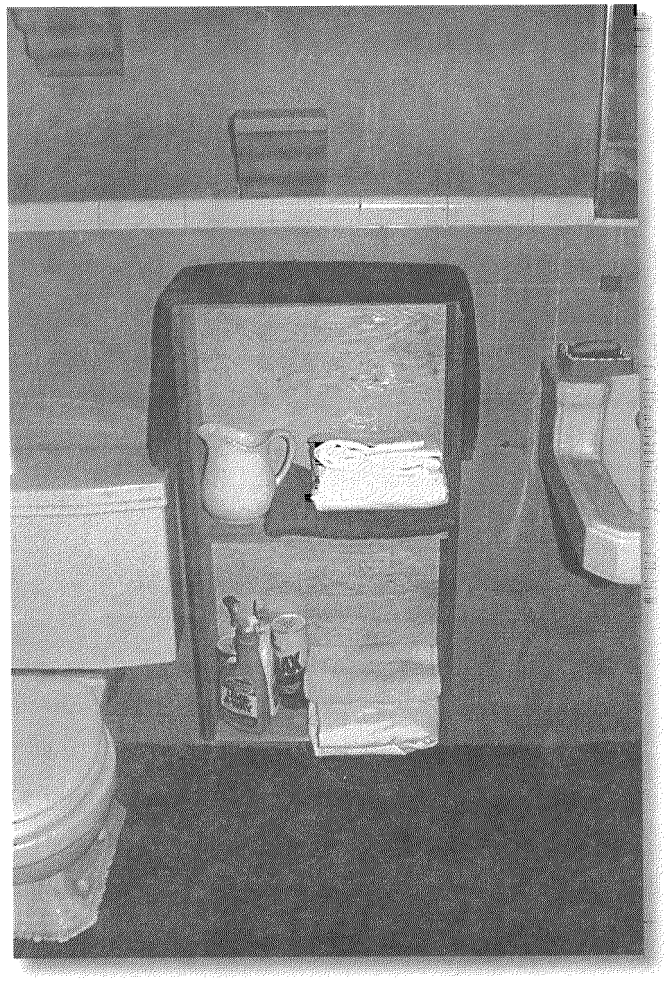
Manifestations
The Ultimate Séance

Floor Plan



shelves, another impossible situation.

Only the back wall of the closet, common with the home's bathroom, remained. Some careful probing and a few small holes cut in the drywall to visually inspect between the wall studs revealed the only possibility - a 27-inch high by 15-inch wide portal between sink and throne. There was even a pipe running between the studs which served as a welcome hand hold while squeezing through.



To conceal the opening, we made a simple, Spartan shelf which appeared to be fastened to the wall. In the finest tradition of Abbott & Costello comedies, the shelf module was hung on concealed hinges and swung open when the hidden mechanism was activated.

Of course we had nightmares about the opening being discovered, especially if the booth were occupied. I can still see the "Peeping Tom Behind Séance Scenes" headlines in my imagination. For that reason (among others) we installed a very sturdy locking mechanism which was engaged when the Butler took his place inside.

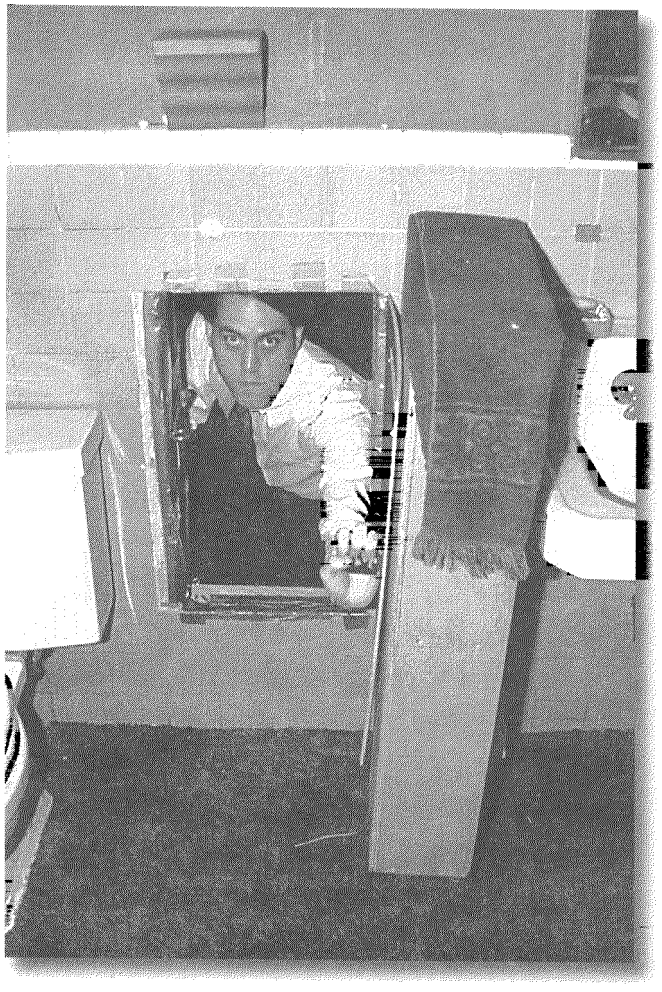
Only after we had a reliable hidden access to the closet did we fully enclose the space by covering the original closet door.

The next step of our plan involved a concealed opening which would allow us some degree of access to the séance room. We began by installing a pair of horizontal wall studs, about 12 inches apart, which spanned the width of the opening. Above those braces, we assembled vertical studs and drywall to cover the area in order to make it just like the rest of the wall.

Below the opening we installed shelves for our assorted paraphernalia. The shelves were of light construction and the

rear surface behind them was 1/8 inch masonite for a very practical reason - in an emergency (a fire for example), the Booth's occupant could easily kick through the panel to escape the narrow confines.

From the start, the drawer beneath the telephone cubby was planned to serve an essential purpose as well - that of delivering to the Medium certain implements for his use in the darkness. You'll be surprised to learn that the drawer is actually three feet long and extends deeply into the Booth. Normally, a panel is installed from inside the Booth which prevents the drawer from being withdrawn more than about 12 inches, the normal expectation. In the darkness, however, the panel is removed so the drawer can be fully extended to place its contents directly at the Medium's right hand.



In practice we discovered that it was quicker and easier simply to exchange props between the Medium and the hidden Butler directly, hand to hand. How?

Remember the space between those horizontal studs?

The shelf and trap setup was our séance room's crowning glory. The very few to whom we tipped the secret never failed to develop an ear-to-ear grin when we stood them in front of that wall and then opened the cleverly concealed trap.

The camouflage for the open space is a sturdy shelf (almost like a mantle) set in place immediately above the opening. Below the shelf is a plank which appears to provide attachment and reinforcement for the shelf supports. In reality, the plank hinges downward to provide extraordinary, albeit limited, access.

It is through this opening that the Butler and the Medium exchange items in the darkness. As you'll see soon, it also

allows for the Butler to deploy several tools which provide for additional ghostly phenomena.



The Musing Box

Theatrically, it is unwise to maintain unabated any degree of tension for too long. Having built up that commodity in our guests, we find it necessary to lower the adrenaline level just a bit. Often the Medium will use humor and other times the material itself supplies the contrast. When we go into the dark segment shortly, we will do it with a startling bang - so it serves our purpose to bring our guests down just a bit now, in

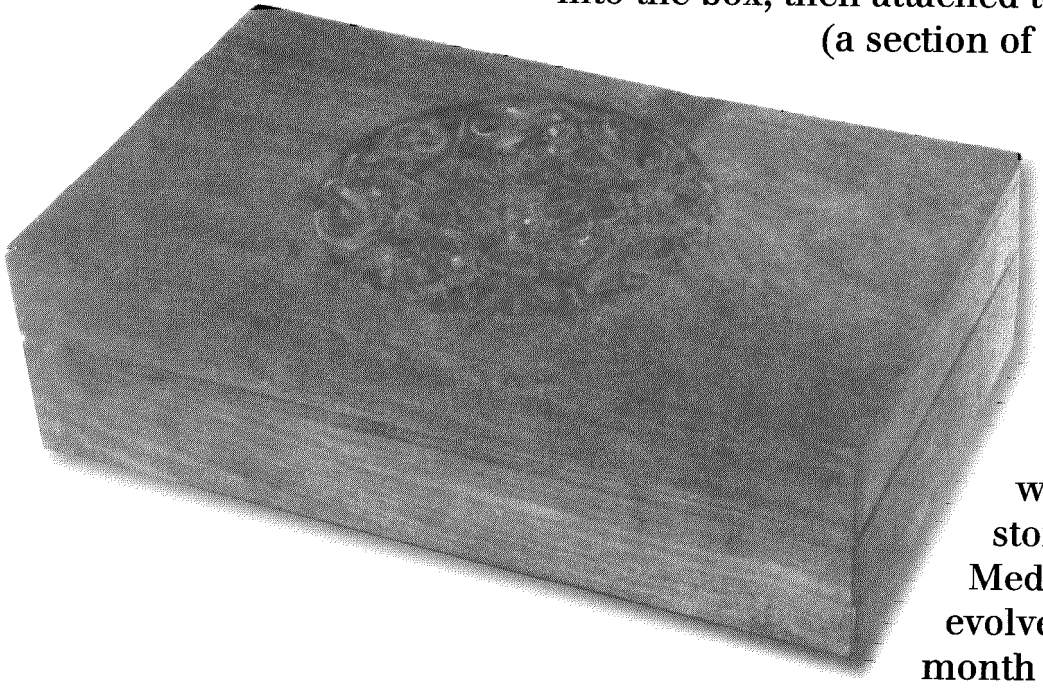
order to maximize the impact later.

The Musing Box, now a marketed commercial piece, is another of those public domain effects - one in which an empty box plays music. Unlike some of the methods which were employed by Frederika, Ted Lesley, or Bob Baker, I wanted the music to actually come from the box, not from some nearby source.

While visiting a music box shop in a local mall, I observed that a very expensive instrument was demonstrated by placing it in the open top drawer of a bureau. The wooden enclosure served to amplify the sound with an unbelievable resonance. That technique gave me an idea.

By placing a standard music box mechanism beneath the table and pressing it tightly to the undersurface, a hollow box directly above would pick up the vibrations and serve as a resonance chamber. In an import store I discovered a beautiful rosewood cigar box with an ornate, carved opening in the top. It is a lousy place to keep cigars but did for the music mechanism what a guitar does for its strings.

The mechanism was modified to allow for a better transmission of vibrations from its frame through the table and into the box, then attached to a thin shim of metal (a section of venetian blind) which was inserted between the table leaf support and the table top proper.



I only have to lift my knee to activate the spring-wound mechanism.

The presentation won't work without the story told by the Medium, one which evolved during our opening month until a single touch

(suggested by Barry Schor, our Butler) transformed it into a tender, poignant piece which almost always managed to evoke a tear or two around the table.

Essentially, it is a "Once Upon a Time..." tale of a man who suffers a personal tragedy, recovers from it, and then suffers an even deeper loss. Emotionally without hope, he takes steps to end his own life but finds encouragement to persevere through the message sent to him via the box's mysterious and well-timed music. After the box is shown to be empty, the presentation concludes with a self-revelatory confessional which leads the audience to understand that the story is a personal narrative.

Powerful stuff.

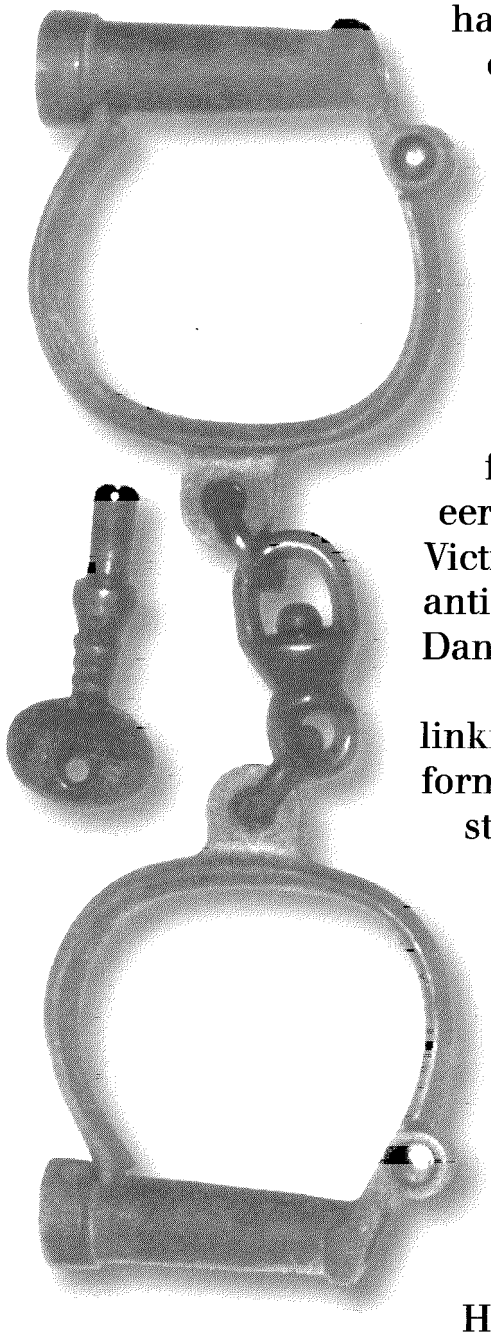
Act III: The Dark

This is the part they came expecting to experience - spirit contact in the darkness. Although the total time spent in the dark is no longer than 20 minutes, this segment is the most demanding of both Medium and the backstage Butler.

Timing and coordination of movements are critical. If what we accomplish could actually be seen by the audience, I'm certain we'd receive applause and admiration for that alone. We practiced long hours, first with our eyes shut and later in the total darkness. Dummy guests were placed in seats around the table to measure for clearance when using some of the extended props through the trap. Nothing was left to chance.

The results are worth the effort.

The Dark Séance begins by lighting the single, slim candle at the table's center. A book of charms, spells, and incantations is opened to a page bearing an illustration of faint spirits hovering over a circle of believers. A brass handbell is placed nearby, completing the mythic triad of "Bell, Book, & Candle." A small tambourine, an instrument often used in Victorian séances, is positioned within the circle of guests.



Still remaining on the table are the locked Darby handcuffs, residue from an earlier biographical excursion in which they were fastened on a small-handed female guest in an illustration of Houdini's legendary ability to shrink his wrists in order to shed unopened shackles.

The 'sign-in sheet', the paper bearing the signatures of the 13 members of the séance circle, is placed inside the rosewood box, along with the burning stick of incense.

All lights are extinguished, leaving only the flickering glow from the single candle, casting its eerie animated shadows on the four walls. The Victrola in the corner of the room is started, playing an antique Bakelite record's crackly version of 'The Blue Danube' as an evocative ambient undertone.

Instructing the guests on the proper manner for linking right-hand-to-left-wrist, person to person, to form 'the Minor Circle' at the table, the Medium also sternly reminds them of their obligations as sitters in a séance.

"Breathe slowly," directs the Medium, "and in unison with me." Three times he takes a long, deep breath; three times he slowly exhales, purging his lungs with a raspy, whispering sound lasting a full minute; three times the guests are frustrated in their efforts to match his respiration.

"Houdini," the Medium intones, "The circle is formed in your honor. We seek your wisdom, your knowledge, and your presence. Come, now, Harry Houdini. Join us. Come. We await a sign. Come..."

At that instant, one of the crystal pendants detaches itself from the chandelier directly over the table and plunges downward, impacting directly on the tambourine. Wham!

Startled reactions are heard around the table. The Medium, reaching forward to snuff out the candle between

forefinger and thumb chirps, "That's the spirit!"

Darkness.

The room is plunged into an all enveloping, never-before-experienced total blackness so sensually and psychologically disorienting that the guests involuntarily squeeze one another's hands tightly.

Adrenaline gushes within their systems, an after effect of the startling transition into darkness. The fight-or-flight reactions are energizing our guests on a primal level. Already, some are 'seeing' spirits, phosphene artifacts from the flickering candle flame.

The Dark Séance is only 15 seconds along.

Things begin to happen. The Medium's voice raises half an octave in pitch, metamorphosing into a staccato, clipped "Brooklyn-esque" dialect. Identifying itself as that of Houdini's spirit, the voice begins addressing guests by name, answering their silent questions, probing them about their motivation for asking and chiding them for their shallow curiosity.

The tambourine rumbles and chatters against the tabletop. In the darkness it moves about, first seeming to be shaking here, then sounding it's tinny-drumhead there. Clearly, it is no longer resting on the table, but is soaring overhead from one corner of the room to another. Simultaneously, the brass bell begins to ring. Twenty six ears within the circle can plainly detect that the bell and tambourine are moving in opposition to one another.

Someone gasps. She has seen *something* appear directly in front of her eyes; a ghostly, amorphous shape defying visual resolution which vanishes so quickly she questions her senses.

The smoky aroma of cheap cigars permeates the atmosphere.

Another guest suppresses a scream; she *feels* her shoulder caressed by an unseen entity but, having been duly warned, dares not break the hand-held circle to brush it away.

The guests turn their heads in the direction of the disembodied voice which continues to address their questions and see a faint, glowing, unidentifiable presence.

Ceiling rafters begin to creak and groan; the table begins to lift and dance beneath the circle's hands.

Houdini's spirit voice, having answered all the questions, bids farewell and grows distant, faint.

It is suddenly very cold in the room. The chilled air carries the ever-stronger odor of sulphur.

"Who are you?" demands the Medium. "What do you want? This is not your time! Why have you intruded in this circle?"

Despite the Medium's assurances that all is under control, the guests begin to grasp that something isn't well in the room.

The record playing on the Victrola begins to skip. The table becomes more animated, jumping and pounding on the floor.

"You must," intones the Medium, "leave us now. You are not welcome here. We are not your circle."

Overhead, the crystal pendants on chandelier can be heard shaking, clattering against each other. The noises from the ceiling grow harsher, louder, more threatening.

"Quickly," shouts the Medium, "Grasp hands tightly around the table. Form the Major Circle. *Quickly!*"

Frantic, fear-moistened hands find each other in the blackness. Grips tighten to the point of reduced circulation.

Almost plaintively, the Medium shouts, "We are now a Major Circle - you must depart; we command it. Leave now!"

From one corner of the room comes a brilliant greenish flash of light and the crash of something falling and breaking. Overhead, the lights on the chandelier flicker, drawing every eye to the swinging, oscillating fixture.

A swishing sound is heard behind the medium – the floor to ceiling curtains sweep apart as the hinged window they concealed flings itself open, breaking a pane and scattering shards of glass over the garden walk outside.

The Victrola has stopped. The Medium lies collapsed in his chair, still leaning against the table. Above the table, the chandelier slowly seeks entropy - swinging ever slower with each oscillation. Silence blankets the room.

No one moves. No one breathes. Eyes seek out other eyes across the table. Slowly, the guests begin to notice some small changes; the handcuffs now lie open on the table, framed pictures have fallen from the walls, and the candle in the center of the circle is now tied in an impossible knot!

As if in verification of the absence of evil, the Blue Danube once again crackles from the Victrola. The Medium is heard to inhale, shallowly at first, then deeper breaths. Sitting up with a start, he releases the hands of those on either side and insists that the other guests do likewise, to break the circle.

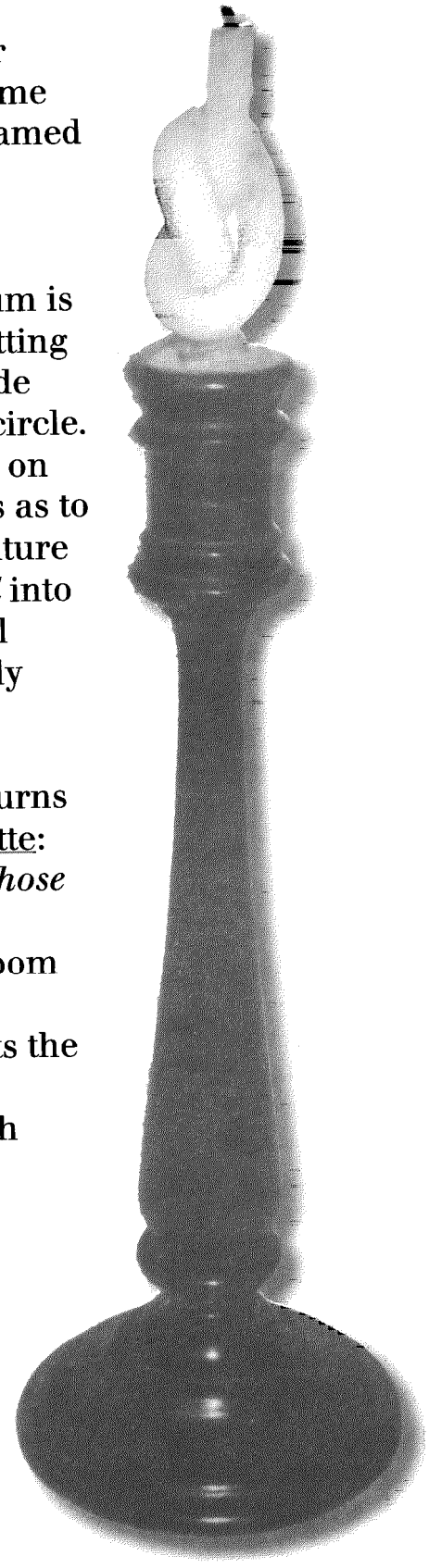
"I'm sure," he says, while opening the rosewood box on the table, "that you may have formed your own hypothesis as to the cause of these manifestations this evening." The signature sheet from within the box is shown to the guests – *burned* into the paper in charred script is the name *Rosabelle*, the final message from Houdini. He smiles wryly, "You're probably right."

He retrieves his hat and cane, quickly collects his paraphernalia, and walks to the door. Pausing there, he turns and quotes the final words from the film Song of Bernadette: *"For those who disbelieve, no explanation is possible; for those who believe, no explanation is necessary."*

After one final glance around the now-disheveled room the Medium says, "I wish each of you – pleasant dreams."

Without another word, he turns on his heel and exits the room.

The Butler re-enters to assist the startled guests with their wraps (and to ensure that memories are the only souvenirs taken from the room).



The Techniques...

Central to accomplishing our blackout phenomena is a procedure known as the 'Séance Grip'.

Because skeptical attendees might reach the logical conclusion that the Medium is behind some of

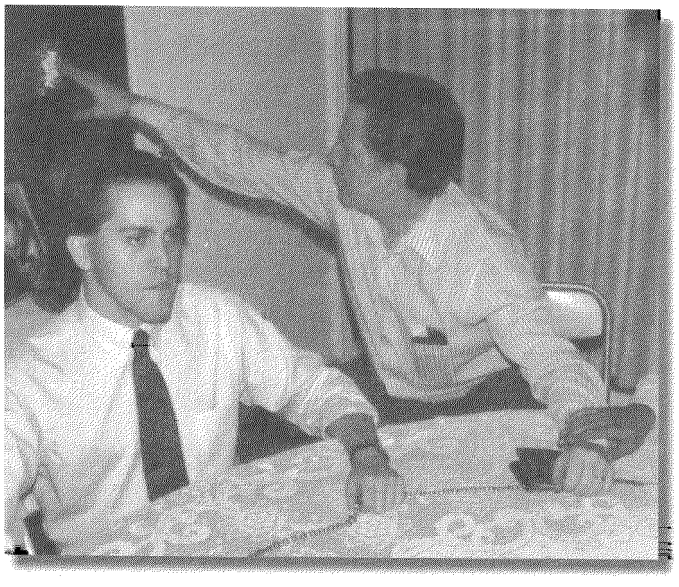


the goings-on, early séance workers determined that it is necessary to account for all hands & bodies, while still allowing the Medium a secret opportunity to accomplish what he needs to do.

With the Medium's hands firmly held by those on either side of him, the audience can relax in the knowledge the apparitions are genuine.

In fact, the hand-to-wrist circle arrangement around the table allows for the Medium to get his right hand free.

He begins by asking everyone at the table to grasp the chain (originally displayled in the shape of a star) with their left hands. With their right hands, they are to grip the left wrists of the persons seated on their right. This is known as the "Minor Circle", a concept we concocted out of thin air; we have our reasons, as you'll soon discover.



The Medium's position at the table was originally set to place him close to the light switch on the wall. The arrangement was intended to provide an excuse to break the circle immediately before going into the dark (to turn out the lights). When the grip is reestablished, the persons at either side don't realize that anything has changed.

In reality, the Medium has reestablished touch with the person on his right *using his repositioned left hand.* This can be seen in the fourth photo in the series.

Later, as the production matured, we realized the drama of the single candle was preferable to chandelier illumination, so the reach was toward the candle at the table's center instead.

As it turned out, that gave us the opportunity to switch candlesticks for an extra punch when the lights came on.



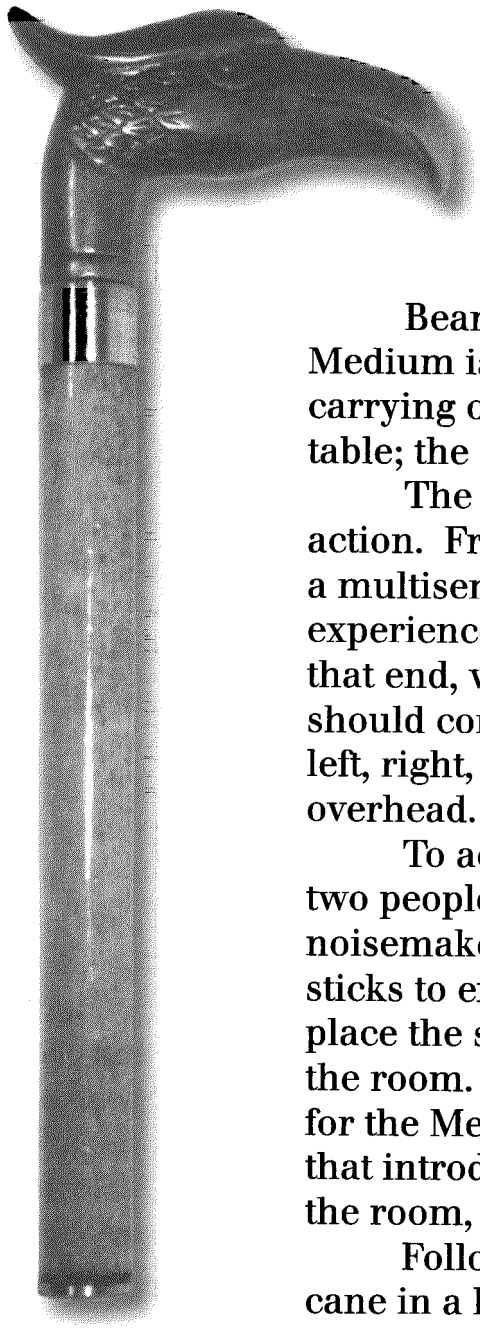
When I snuff the candle flame, I just grip the candle and bring it back with me as I take my seat again. The base of the candlestick is tucked beneath my arm to lessen the risk of it tipping over if accidentally touched in the dark.



The instant we go dark, the Butler opens the trap and hands out the knotted candle which I place under my thumb, also for steadiness. Rising out of my seat is now out of the question, so in order to reach the center of the table with the knotted candlestick, I must have some help. It is delivered in the form of a stick with a pair of nails in the end which slide around the narrowest part of the candlestick. Supported on the end of the extended Candle Fork, the knotted candle is placed directly in the center of the table, marked by a flat metallic plate under the tablecloth. A strong magnet in the base of the candlestick helps locate the proper position and also keeps the knotted candle from tipping over when the table starts to gyrate near the end of the evening's entertainment.



The candle's knot is formed by rolling kitchen plastic wrap around a thin taper (candle) before gently heating it. When softened, the candle is knotted. Then we peel away the plastic wrap once the candle reassumes room temperature.



The Candle Fork is returned to the closeted Butler, immediately followed by the straight candle and finally, the handcuffs. In order to keep the cuffs from making noise, it is necessary to grip them by the chain between the bracelets. A careful handoff between Medium and Butler further reduces the potential for noise.

Bear in mind that during all of these exchanges, the Medium is - in the 'voice' of Houdini - answering questions and carrying on conversations with the guests at the darkened table; the entertainment doesn't stop just because we're busy.

The noisemakers, bell and tambourine, are now put into action. From the start we wanted a multisensory, stereophonic experience for our attendees. To that end, we felt that sounds should come from *everywhere*, left, right, front, back, and overhead.



To accomplish this with only two people meant putting the noisemakers on rods, poles, or sticks to extend our reach and place the sounds in all corners of the room. We already had plans for the Medium's cane, so rather that introduce an extra prop into the room, we decided to make the cane do double duty.

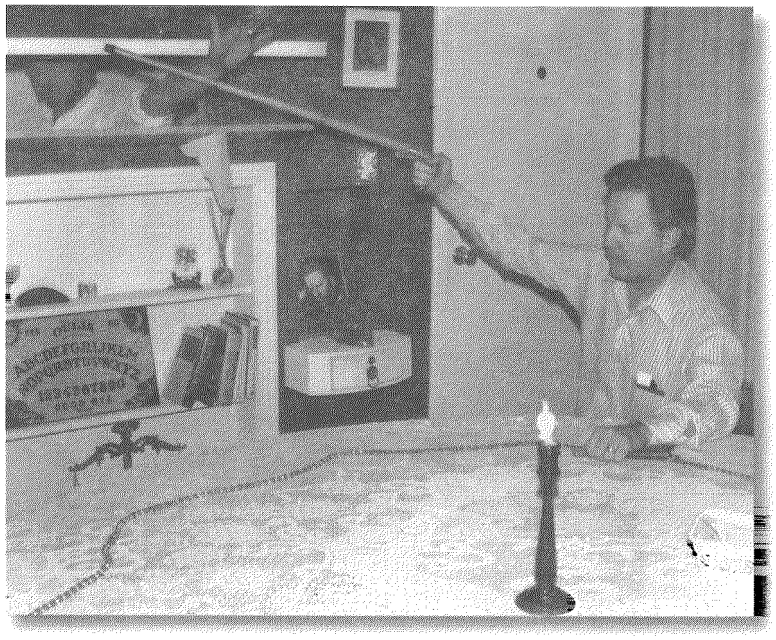
Following his entrance, the Medium casually places the cane in a leaning position next to the telephone nook. In the dark, it's just within the his reach. The cane is swiveled up - above horizontal - behind the guests at the Medium's right, to meet the extended arm of the Butler in the booth. His arm is positioned to prevent the cane contacting the shelf and making unwanted racket.

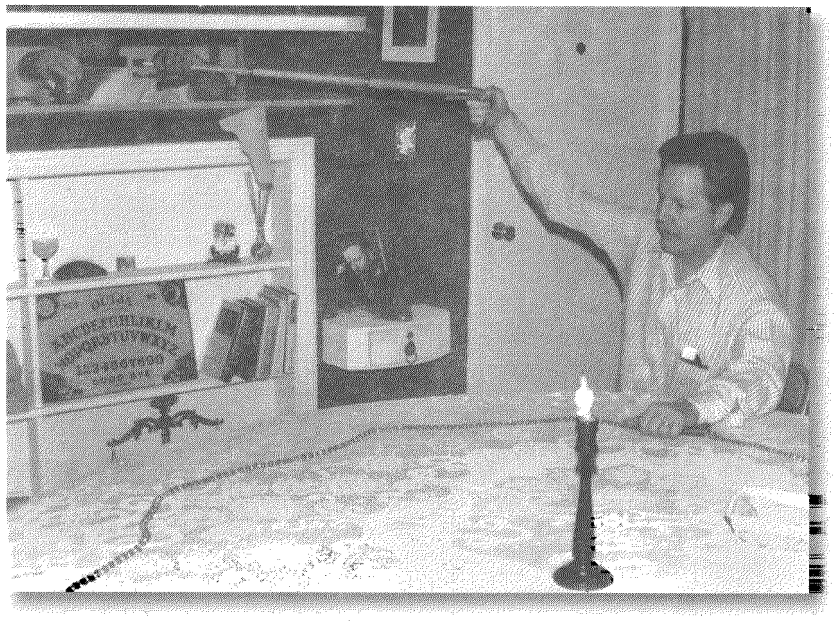
Once his arm and cane are in contact, the Butler slides his hand to grasp the rubber tip on the end. A duplicate brass

hand bell is in the booth, ready to be attached to the cane. It has been modified by removing the wooden handle, substituting in its place a hollow, tapered metal cone mounted perpendicular to the bell's axis (we salvaged an inoperative Kikuchi fire wand for the part - we were, after all, in the back room of a well-equipped magic shop).

The rubber tip of the cane fits snugly into the cone atop the bell. When the bell is firmly mounted to the end of the cane, the Butler gives the assembly a wiggle to let the Medium know he's done. Before he releases the instrument, he rolls it to one side which keeps the bell's clapper silent as the weight of the cane & bell combination is taken up by the Medium.

He moves the cane & bell to the table and silently rests the bell on the tabletop while







hooking the handle of the cane over his shoulder. There simply isn't any other place to put it!

Next, the Medium reaches for the tambourine; since silence is impossible with this item, it begins the aural manifestations for the evening. As he shakes it, the racket



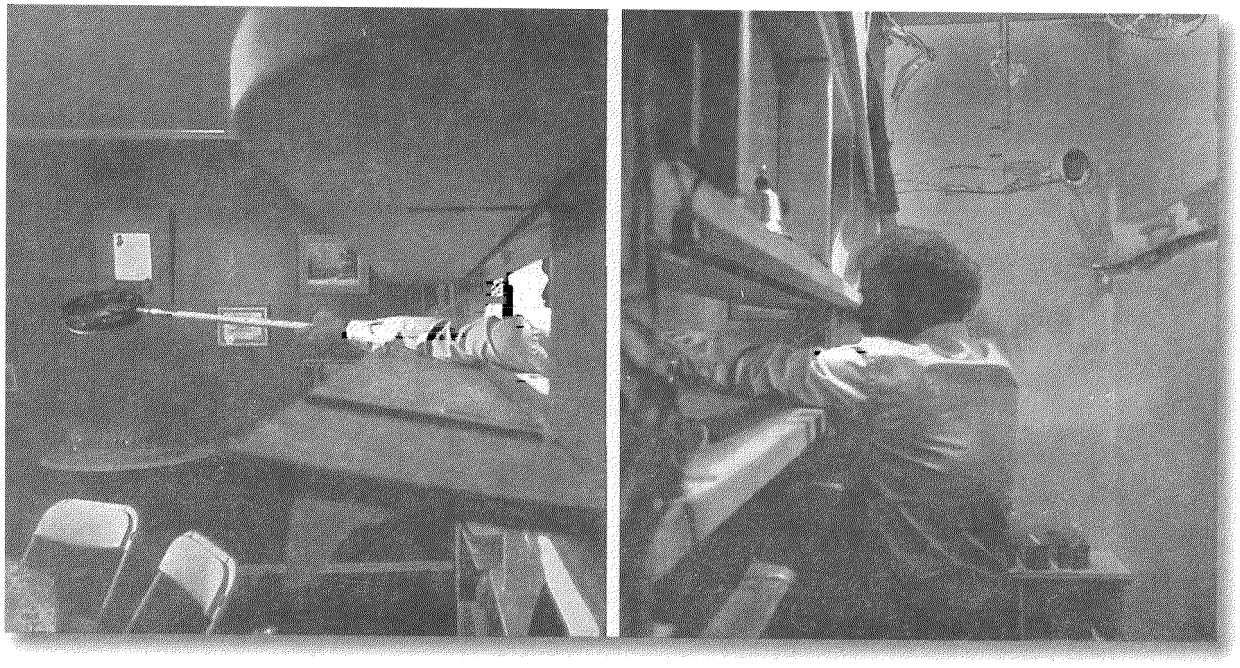
provides some cover for the Butler, in the booth, who is readying a duplicate (we tested dozens of tambourines in the music store to find two with exactly the same pitch) tambourine on the end of a reaching stick.

In moving tambourine to a spot over the head of guest #12 (#1 sat to the Medium's left), the Medium turns it drumhead-side-up. A particular pattern of shakes alerts the Butler that his noisemaker should take over. As the booth-operated tambourine is moved away from the Medium, he slowly and carefully places his tambourine in the only remaining place where he is guaranteed both silence and instant access – he places it directly on his head! Thank goodness this takes place in the darkness – it does look rather like a 1940's bellhop cap perched up there.

This is the point at which the bell begins to ring. With sound from the tambourine coming from one direction and the bell's tones coming from the exact opposite side of the room, there can be no doubt in the guests' minds that the spooky stuff has begun.



Another side note – you may notice a rather blank 'thousand yard' stare on my face in all of these photos; it's an artifact of working in complete darkness. I learned to 'defocus' in the dark to avoid the instinctive effort of



straining to see something, anything. Habit took over when we made these photos.

Following the racket-making, we employ almost the exact reverse procedure to clean up. The bell & cane are once again rested on my shoulder, the Butler positions his tambourine directly over #12's head, and rattles it in a recognizable sequence. Silently, I retrieve my tambo-hat, move it near the now-silent duplicate, and begin shaking it. During that cacophony the tambourine-on-a-stick is withdrawn into the booth and stowed.



About this time, Houdini always finds a reason to be upset at some skeptic (real or imagined) within the circle. As a gesture of his contempt for the unbeliever, he tosses the tambourine – lightly, but noisily – onto the table in front of the unsuspecting victim. Again, fabulous reactions!

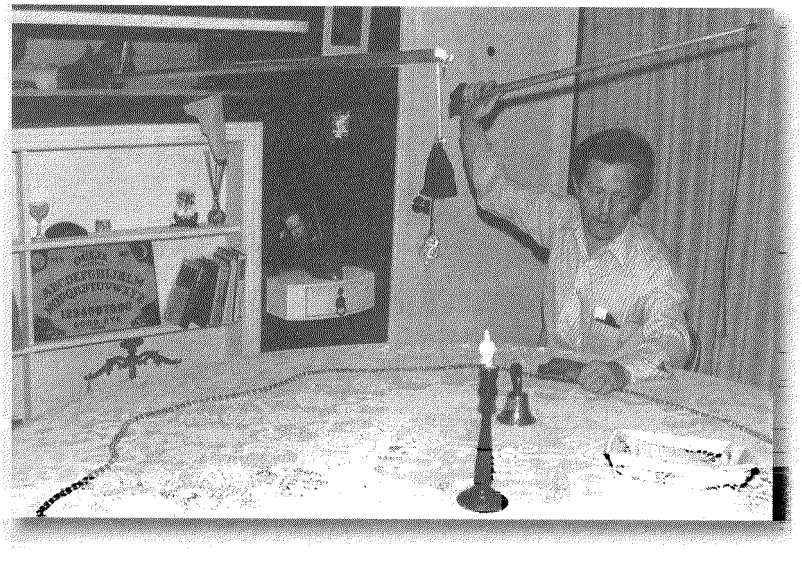
The Butler next returns the open handcuffs for replacement on the table. (Because the table will be shaking, jumping, and gyrating shortly, exact repositioning of the cuffs is not an issue; things will be bouncing all over the place. The table tipping is due solely to a strategic placement of the Medium's knee beneath a support beam under the table. By merely raising up on one toe, the entire table is effortlessly lifted from the floor.)



Shortly thereafter, the bell gets detached from the cane in preparation for its return to the booth.

The cane remains in play, however. A cane-long length of carpet thread is attached to the cane, under the rubber tip. The thread's free end is secured to the head of the cane with a pellet of wax.

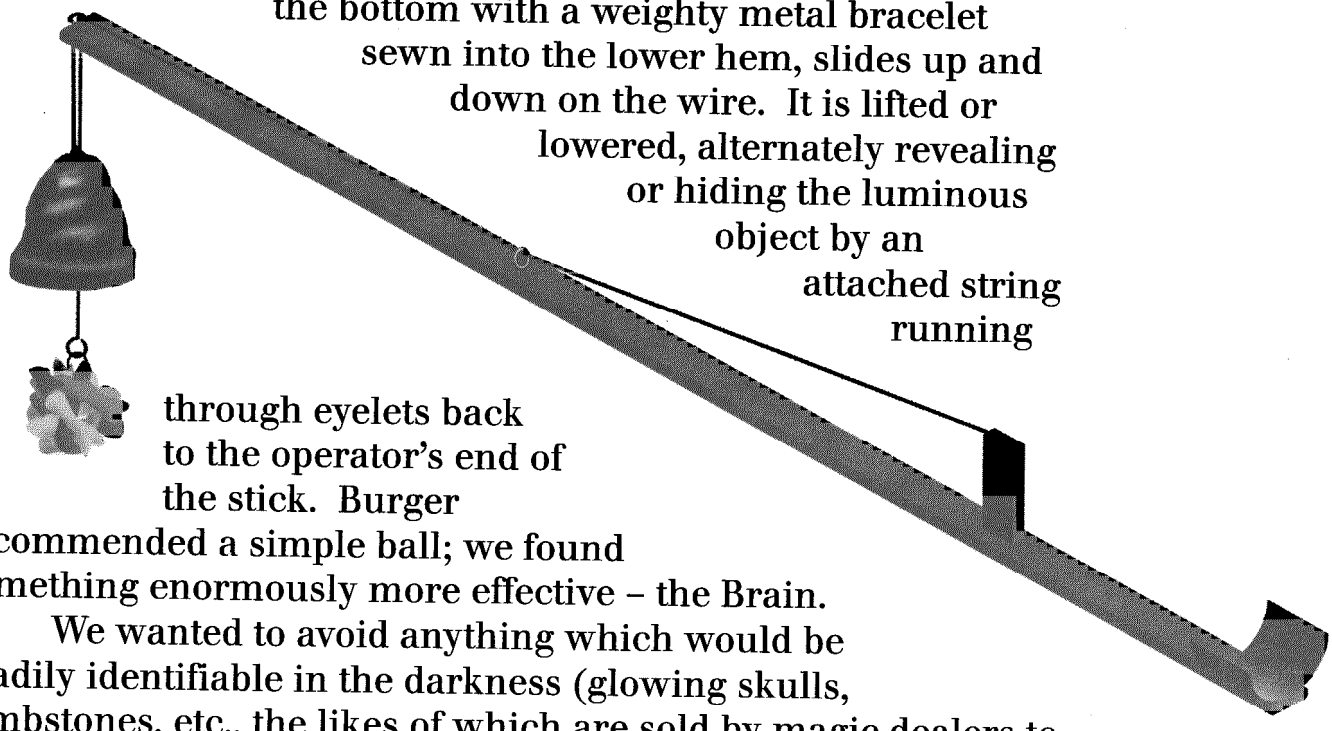
After the thread has been pulled free of the wax, the cane is wielded like a soft buggy whip, gently flipping the thread across hands and dragging it over hairdos all around the table. (For better visibility, the thread was replaced with a length of yarn for these photos.)



There is nothing so terrifying as feeling as if something is *crawling* over your skin or hair in the absolute, total darkness! And, because the guests' hands are held on both sides, they can't instinctively brush it away, increasing the psychic tension. Even those to the Medium's left are not immune; the thread is an equal opportunity terrifier.

As the thread & cane are having their impact upon the audience, the Butler is quietly deploying one of the most diabolic tools we use. Again, a tip o' the hat to Eugene Burger's Spirit Theatre, from which we lifted this idea.

The Brain Stick is a long piece of wood with a luminous object suspended on a thick wire (coat hanger stock) at one end. A black cloth bag, weighted and held open at the bottom with a weighty metal bracelet sewn into the lower hem, slides up and down on the wire. It is lifted or lowered, alternately revealing or hiding the luminous object by an attached string running through eyelets back to the operator's end of the stick. Burger recommended a simple ball; we found something enormously more effective – the Brain.



We wanted to avoid anything which would be readily identifiable in the darkness (glowing skulls, tombstones, etc., the likes of which are sold by magic dealers to magicians who don't know better). Such images would be immediately discounted by the audience. Our requirements demand something much more subtle.

In the end, we settled on a shape the size of a golf ball made from a 'scrunched' rope of glow-in-the-dark Play-Doh children's modeling clay compound. We slathered it with transparent blue paint to adjust the glowing color away from the common greenish hue to something more mysterious.

When the cloth cover is raised, revealing the softly glowing Brain for a second or two, directly in front of a participant's face, it is not easily identified as a known object. Instead, highlights and shadows, ridges and crevices are resolved , in their mind's eyes, into spirit facial features.

An additional apparition was produced the first time by accident! We installed one additional small signal light in the air conditioning ductwork with which the Butler can alert the Medium for various purposes (cues, emergencies, etc.). It is actually a small light emitting diode (L.E.D.) no larger than sesame seed which, we discovered, projects sufficient light to cast a very faint glow all the way across the room. Mind you, the light is very, very dim and can only be perceived using peripheral vision and even then only after one's eyes have adjusted to the total darkness for twelve to fifteen minutes.

Because it is focused directly on the Medium, it gave us a wonderful idea. During the dark, after the tambourine sequence is history, I pull a wrinkled white handkerchief out of my pocket and drape it over my head and face. In the projected glow from that L.E.D., it seems to be a vague, amorphous spirit hovering near the Medium. Shifting my head from side to side causes the image to appear and disappear.

This extremely faint ghostly vision is never seen by most guests. But those who do see it will never forget the encounter.

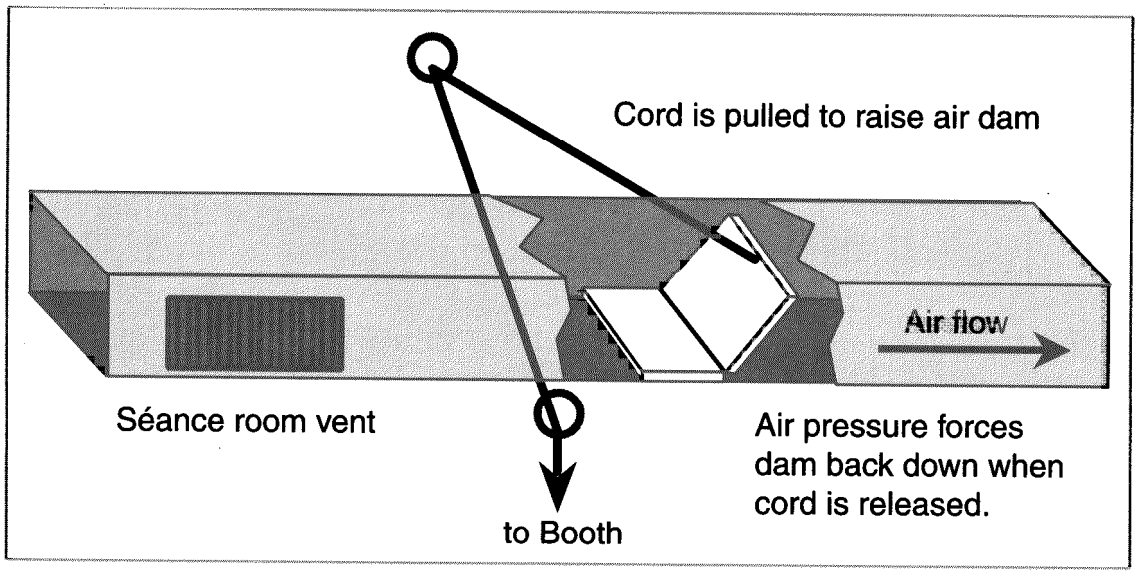
By this time, just about all twelve questions have been answered, so it's time to clean up and get ready for the finale.

The cane is returned to its previous position against the wall, both the bell gimmick and the Musing Box gimmick (removed from beneath the table) are handed off to the Butler in the Booth, and the Medium positions himself for the finish.

You'll recall the earlier mention of the Minor Circle? We tell our audience that it is all we need for communication with the spirits – a simple hand-on-wrist connection around the table. The Major Circle, all 13 participants holding hands, is only employed when one wished to *control* the spirits.

Wouldn't you know it? Those pesky spirits soon need controlling. With the exit of Houdini's spirit, another more malevolent entity apparently tries to sneak in. That's when the room gets cold (we divert the entire building's air conditioning output into one room, lowering the temperature by 25 degrees within two minutes), the table gyrates, and all Hades breaks loose in the room.

The drop in temperature is accomplished by raising a hinged 'air dam' in the ductwork to direct the unit's output into the séance room. (In Phoenix, Arizona, we have some substantial air conditioning units.)

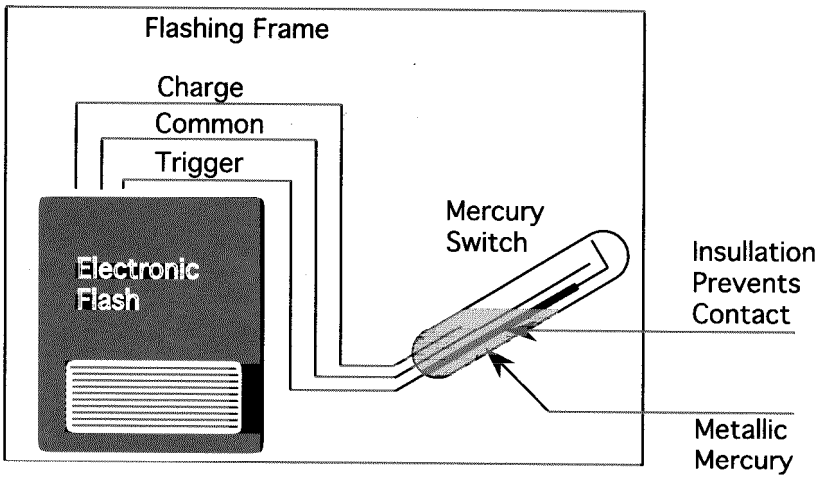


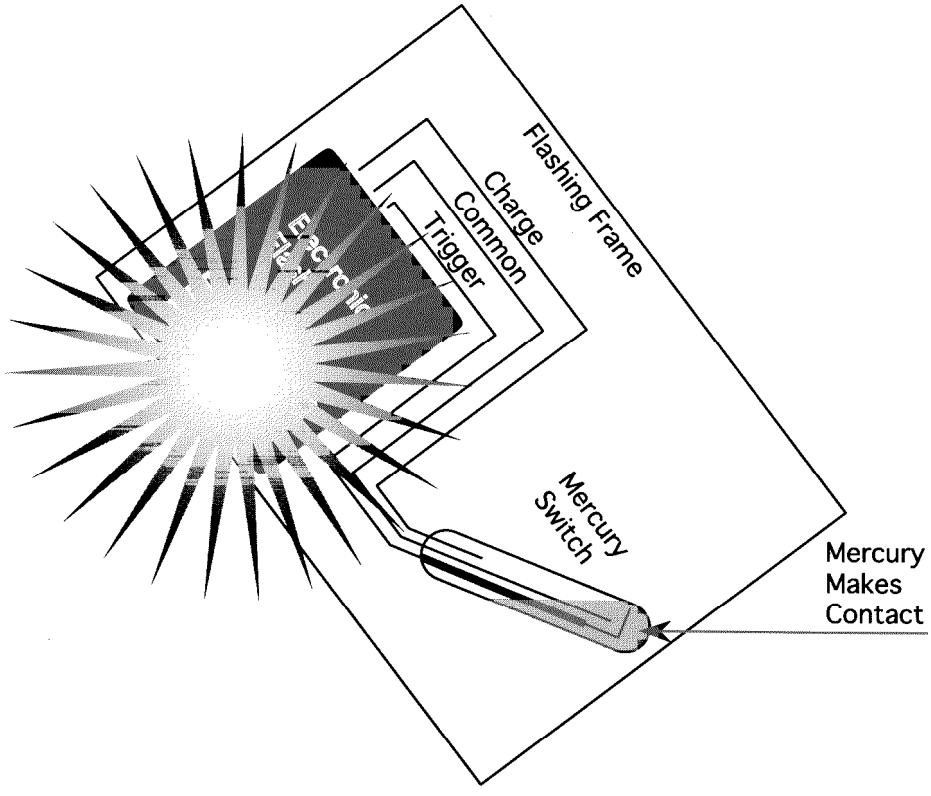
When the guests are asked to form the Major Circle, that hand-to-hand contact around the table, the Medium's free right hand is positioned directly above his left hand (which has been making contact with the person to his right). Simultaneously, he moves his left hand to the left and offers his right hand to the person on his right to clasp.

Thus, the Major Circle provides a way to reestablish the circle, reaffirming to all that his hands were never free. The people on both sides of him will swear to it.

The final series of effects are purely mechanical in nature and all are activated from the Booth.

That eerie green flash comes from within one of the two framed pieces of artwork on the wall opposite the Medium. An electronic flash from a camera is hidden inside, wrapped in dark green cellophane to color and reduce the light. The flash is activated with a mercury switch - a capsule of liquid metal (mercury) with the electrical contact points for the circuit sealed inside. When the capsule is tilted, the mercury flows over the contacts, making the connection, and generating the



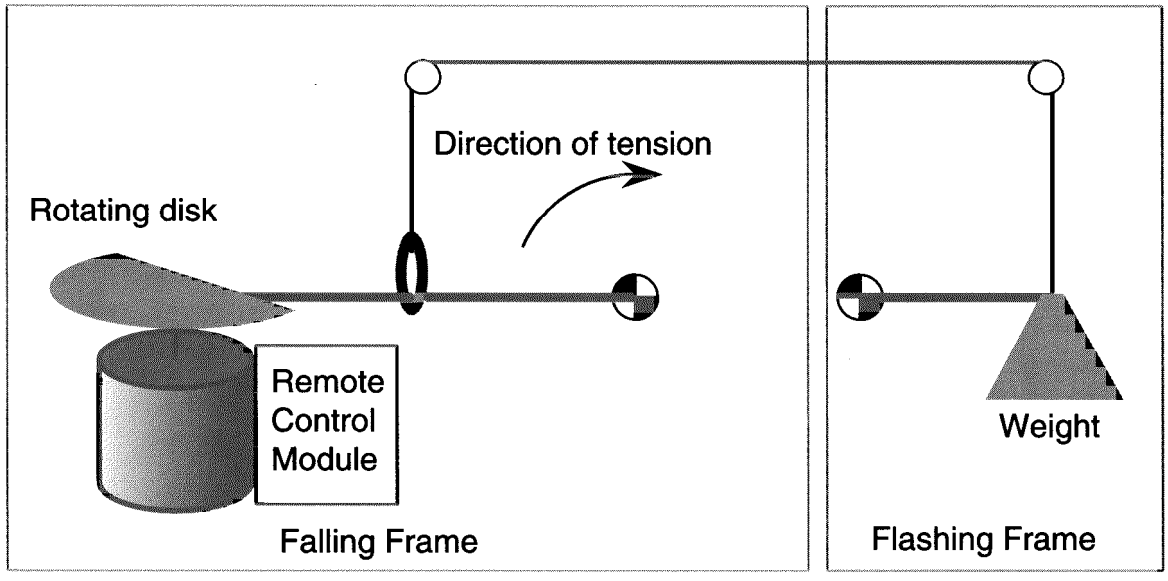


flash. The tilting occurs simultaneously with the crash of the other, falling, frame.

A thin metal shaft (salvaged from a broken Zombie gimmick) has been inserted through the wall into the adjacent room. The end of the shaft in the séance room is bent at a 45 degree angle. When the angled end points upwards it supports the heavy frame but when the shaft rotates, the frame will fall away. In the room on the other side of the wall, the end of the shaft is bent at a 90 degree angle, parallel to the wall. It is held in place beneath a small semicircular disk mounted on the shaft of an electric motor. When the motor is turned on, the disk rotates, freeing the frame-holding shaft to turn and dump its load.

The flashing frame is similarly rigged with its offset shaft held in place by a string and pulley connection to the first frame's rig. The weight is insurance there will be sufficient

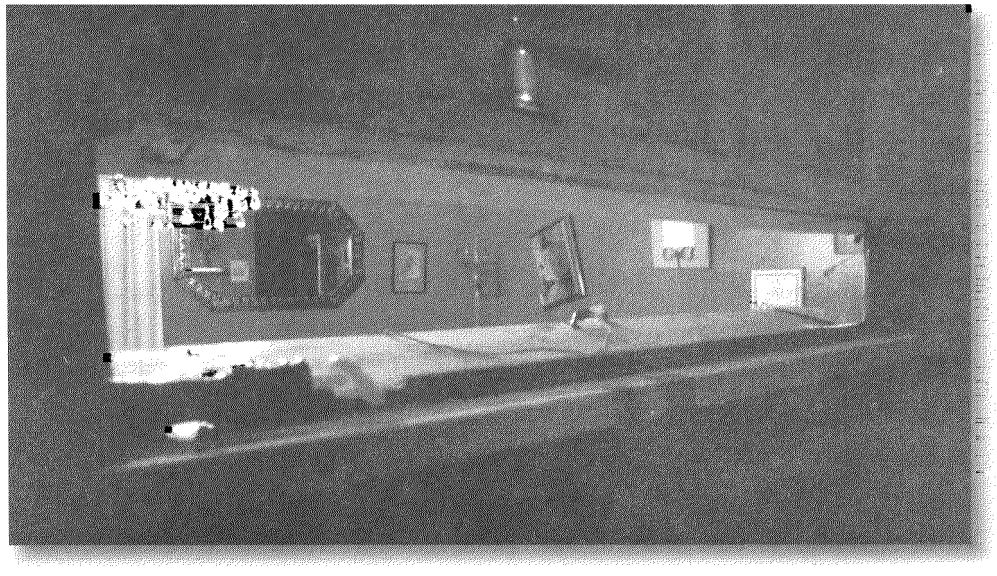
turning force on the shaft when the link to the falling frame shaft is released. As the falling frame is activated, the shaft is pulled upward and the small ring on the end of the string slips off. This releases the flashing frame shaft to turn, dropping the flashing frame. (Design by Rube Goldberg, ©1987)

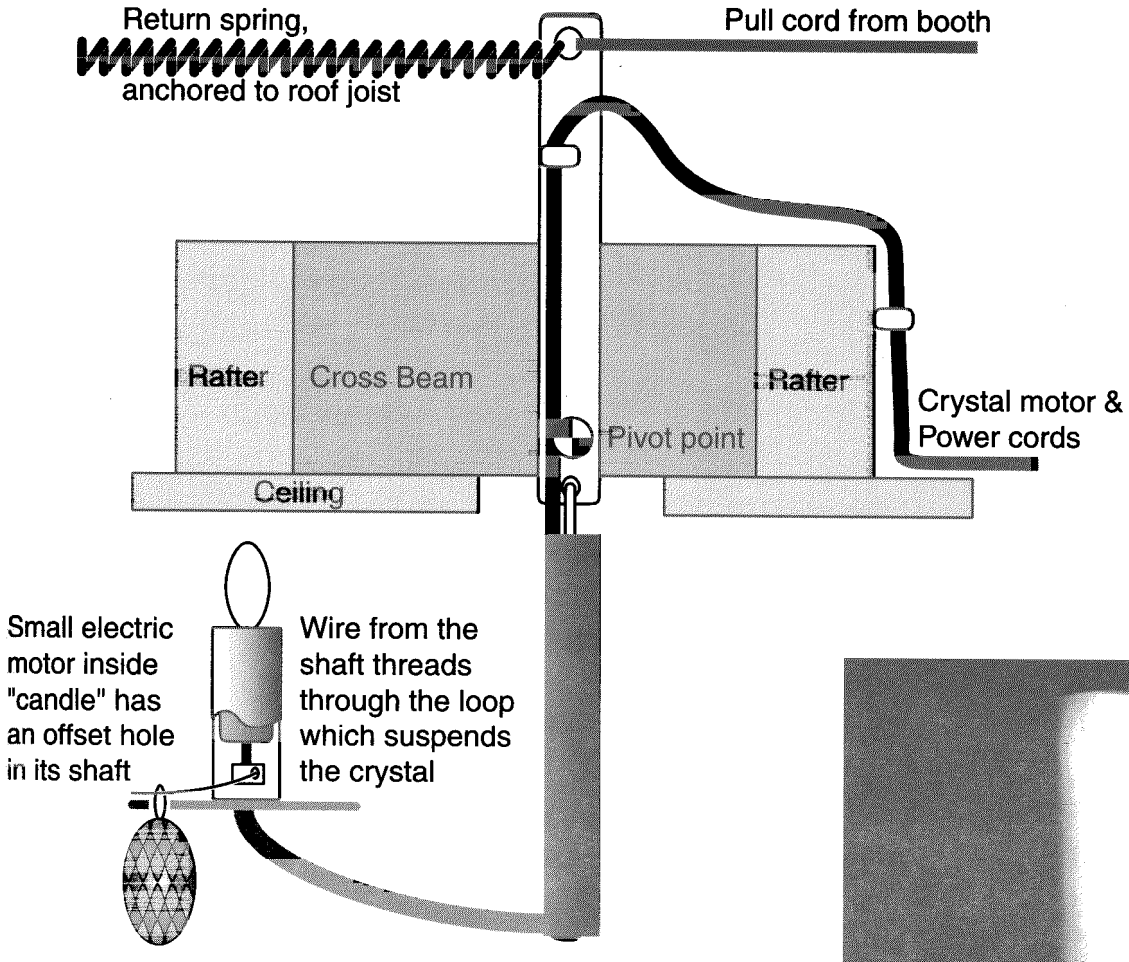


The flashing frame is additionally secured to the wall with an eyebolt thorough which is threaded the normal picture frame wire. Thus, it never falls to the floor risking potential damage to the delicate electronic flash mechanism inside.

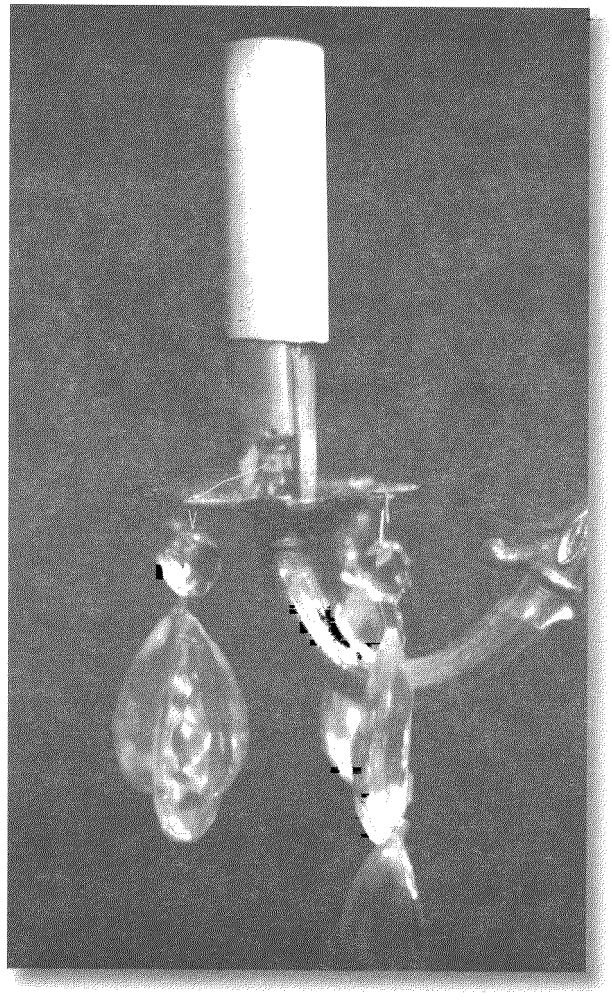
The flashing frame can be seen, tilted askew, on the far wall in the view-through-the-trap photo. Note the bell gimmick above the opening and the knotted candle on the shelf toward the left end.

Our crystal chandelier moves in the darkness because it is not firmly mounted to the ceiling. Instead, we affixed a pivoting arm to a crossbeam between two ceiling rafters. The bottom end of the pivot arm has a hole to which a link of the chandelier's chain is





attached. A fairly strong spring, anchored to a roof joist, supplies the balancing energy to a pull cord from the Booth, both of which are attached to the top of the pivot arm. The Butler



in the Booth simply tugs on the cord to urge the chandelier into motion. Then, exactly as with a children's swing on the playground, he 'pumps' the chandelier with well timed pulls on the cord causing the apparatus to swing even more drastically.

In order to get the individual crystal to drop on cue at the start of the

Dark Séance, one of the 'candles' on the chandelier contains a miniature electric motor. A very thin copper wire is threaded through a wheel on the end of the motor's shaft. The other end of the wire holds the crystal in place. When this motor is turned on from the Booth, the shaft spins and wraps the wire around it, withdrawing it from the crystal.

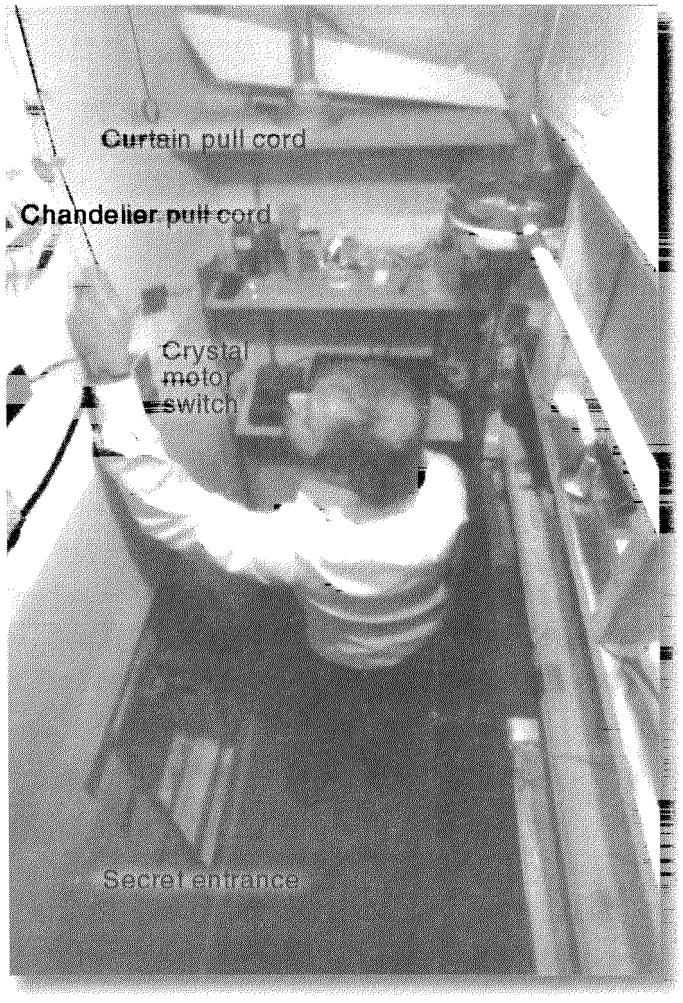
At the very end of the séance, to get the curtains to open (allowing the malevolent spirit to escape) we spliced a second pull cord to the original (near the ceiling and concealed behind the curtains), threading it behind decorative molding and routing it into the Booth. A quick tug on the cord yanks the curtains open.

The opening curtains trigger the smashing window, once again mechanically. The geared mechanism has been removed from the hinged window, which allows the panel of four panes to freely swing through an arc of 180 degrees.

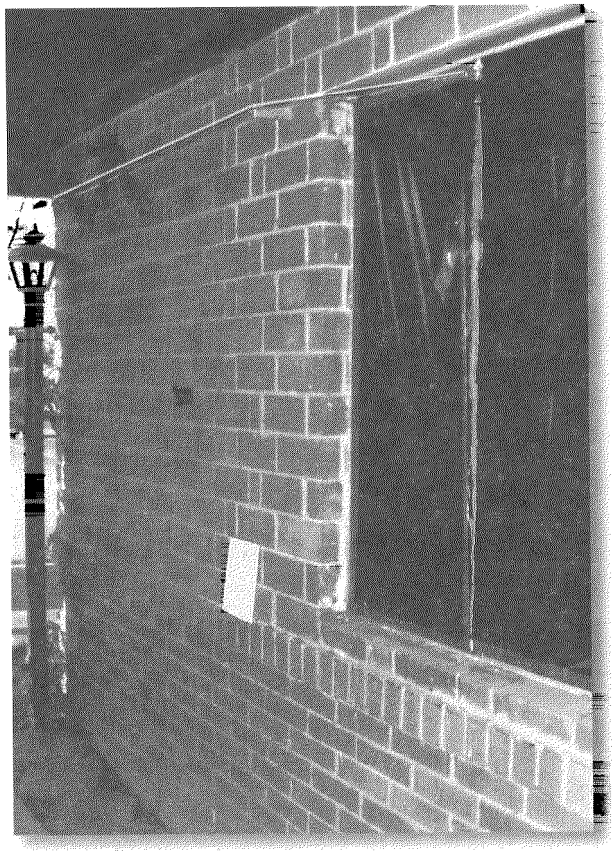
We use the same 'withdrawn pin' release as with the dropping chandelier pendant. A small bolt, attached to the swinging window pane, passes through a hole drilled in the center post of the window frame. A tiny pin, attached to the curtains, is threaded through a hole drilled through the end of the bolt.

While there is tension on the window panel to pull open, supplied by a spring and wire arrangement outside the building (traced in white in the first photo), the pin retains the bolt in the window frame, keeping the spring-loaded window closed and the room light-tight.

When the curtains are drawn open, the pin pulls free of the bolt, releasing the window. It virtually flies open, smashing a pane of glass which is



in place against the wall. In these photos, a white panel is positioned where the pane of glass would be. Note also the broken bottom pane – a small detail which never went unnoticed. The sheer curtain is arranged so that it always pulls through the open window.



The pane of glass to be broken and the little wooden block adding tension to the wire are installed by the Medium shortly before he makes his initial entrance. Fate was forever smiling upon us – a window and mirror company was located a short walk down the alley at the rear of our parking lot, so their dumpster provided an abundance of cost-free glass to break.



As a final, jarring assault on our guests' senses, we mounted a powerful floodlight outside, beneath the eaves, and aimed it to shine through the open window, directly across the Medium's position at the table, blasting the room with an incredibly harsh brightness.

Rescued from the darkness and delivered into the light. What an appropriate metaphor!

Our guests' journey is complete.

The séance is ended.

You are cordially invited to attend a special Hallowe'en evening sitting of

Manifestations — the Ultimate Séance

To start promptly at 7:00 o'clock in the evening
Saturday, October 31, 1987
720 East Camelback Road
Phoenix, Arizona

(late arriving guests will not be admitted)

R.S.V.P. before October 15, 1987
Telephone 234-3887

ADMIT ONE
$25

_____, 19__

_____:

Valid This Show Only.

Manifestations
THE ULTIMATE SEANCE
An Evening of Spirit Theatre
716 East Camelback, Phoenix, Arizona 85014
Entrance located at 720 E. Camelback (rear of building)
(602) 234-3887

LEE EARLE **234-3887**

Manifestations
THE ULTIMATE SEANCE
An Evening of Spirit Theatre
716 East Camelback, Phoenix, Arizona 85014

Our Pre-Show Checklist

- GENERAL
 - Outside
 - sign lights on
 - North Entrance sign on front door
 - porch light on
 - doorbell disabled
 - gate open
 - walk, patio, porch lights on
 - patio blinds down
 - all areas swept
 - traffic cones placed
 - Inside
 - bathroom cleaned
 - vacuum
 - basin and commode clean
 - supplies
 - towels
 - soap
 - toilet paper
 - other rooms' lights off
 - A / C vent in adjacent room closed
 - curtains closed in adjacent room
 - front door locked
 - cash drawer stocked
 - credit card imprinter ready
 - telephone ringers off
 - phone machines on
- BOOTH
 - Props & Controls
 - open drawer bolt
 - cycle shelf to eliminate adhesion
 - all electric plugs in
 - amplifier
 - outside lights - ON
 - keyboard
 - DC adapter for LED's & crystal
 - power hitter
 - cigar
 - lighter
 - knotted candle on ledge
 - candle fork on ledge
 - bell gimmick above ledge
 - tamborine stick set
 - air dam lever - UP
 - ball stick charged
 - creaking tape rewound
 - amplifier - ON
 - check LED's
 - binary signals
 - face light
 - handcuff key
 - peek-vent door - CLOSED
 - Papers & Wax crayon ready
 - Shelf locked
 - Light off
- SEANCE ROOM
 - Vacuum & dust
 - Supplies
 - Clean glasses
 - Tablecloth & lace clean
 - Beverages chilled
 - Wine
 - Sparkling cider
 - water
 - Clipboards
 - cleaned
 - papers
 - pens - TESTED
 - incense
 - pre show burning
 - new stick ready
 - matches at hand
 - SET DRESSING
 - table set
 - beam at left knee
 - chairs spaced
 - medium's chair reserved
 - new candle at center
 - star chain laid out
 - wood tray w/wineglass
 - bent wineglass in bar
 - backup bent glass in cabinet
 - shelves set
 - tamborine
 - bell
 - basket
 - letter
 - Houdini photos
 - handcuffs in frame
 - keys in frame
 - trash can empty
 - damp bar towel draped on can
 - EFFECTS RIGGED
 - falling frame
 - tighten screw in motor
 - check for spacer behind frame
 - frame hung
 - flashing frame
 - check battery
 - test flash unit
 - rosabelle paper set on clipboard
 - dropping crystal wired
 - drawer
 - drawer back installed
 - brass tray
 - soot on bottom
 - parchment papers
 - drawer locked
 - key under skull
 - Musing Box
 - gimmick wound
 - installed under table
 - Victrola
 - cassette players
 - rewind
 - cued
 - set on "Play"
 - volume checked
 - plug in wall
 - record in place
 - switch - OFF
 - lid down
 - doily spread out
 - window
 - spring
 - cable stretched
 - camouflage installed
 - pane of glass at hand
 - release pin inserted
 - window latch unlocked
 - scrim curtain
 - rolled
 - tucked into window
 - curtains closed
 - check roller bushing
- KITCHEN
 - Props
 - rosewood box
 - Hershey Kisses
 - locket
 - ornate handkerchief
 - Rupert's Pearl (in little black bag)
 - handkerchief in side pocket
 - blaster balls in side pocket
 - pocket watch in vest
 - lighter in vest
 - cane
 - check thread
 - hat
 - heat powder ready
 - Supplies
 - paper
 - pencils
 - lighter fluid
 - paper towels
 - soap
 - reference books

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 5, 1988



CONTACT:
CRAIG NICHOLS
or LEE EARLE
234-3887

An Evening of Spirit Theatre

PRESS RELEASE

"MANIFESTATIONS," A THEATRICAL PRESENTATION PATTERNED ON A 19TH CENTURY SPIRIT SEANCE, IS A UNIQUE HALLOWE'EN EXPERIENCE.

Hallowe'en night, 1926: Harry Houdini dies, but promises to return from the grave if he is able. For the next ten years, a seance is held on the anniversary of his death. No contact is ever made.

Hallowe'en night, 1987: Fifty years after the last Houdini seance, another attempt to contact his spirit is made during a live, nationally televised seance. Once again, the spirit of Harry Houdini never arrives.

Why not? Because he was at our place! "MANIFESTATIONS, the Ultimate Seance" presents an elegant evening of Spirit Theatre each week in our Victorian parlour. This is the show that has earned rave reviews in every major paper in the Valley of the Sun.

Best of all, the seance Medium is available to appear on your show to answer questions about "MANIFESTATIONS" and provide some fun-filled psychic entertainment.

"MANIFESTATIONS" is the most unique entertainment in Phoenix. And the attached press quotes and information will assure you that it is one of the most topical and enjoyable subjects to have on your show. Don't miss out on "MANIFESTATIONS."

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TO: HOTEL CONCIERGE AND MEETING PLANNERS



CONTACT:
CRAIG NICHOLS
or LEE EARLE
234-3887

An Evening of Spirit Theatre

PRESS RELEASE

"MANIFESTATIONS," A THEATRICAL PRESENTATION PATTERNED ON A 19TH CENTURY SPIRIT SEANCE, IS A UNIQUE ENTERTAINMENT EXPERIENCE.

Let's face it, recommending unusual entertainment to hotel guests can strain even the most informed concierge or meeting planner. A hayride/cookout or western village shootout is expected. A home tour or day-long scenic ride is fine. Shopping and plays? Your clients have that at home.

ENTER: "MANIFESTATIONS"

Mysterious and supremely entertaining, this exciting evening of Spirit Theatre is nothing short of remarkable. Although the apparitions and hauntings one will experience seem authentic, this seance is not one to summon up dear Aunt Emma's ghost. Rather, it is a unique entertainment sensation that can only be experienced. This is truly intimate theatre at its finest.

Limited to 12 guests at each seating, "MANIFESTATIONS" invites you into a Victorian parlour to re-create a 19th century spirit seance. The intimacy of the setting adds to the adventure.

For an evening your guests will long remember, we encourage you to recommend "MANIFESTATIONS".

Complimentary tickets will be made available to each concierge or meeting planner and immediate desk staff as seating allows.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 18, 1988

CONTACT:
CRAIG NICHOLS
or LEE EARLE
234-3887



An Evening of Spirit Theatre

PRESS RELEASE

"MANIFESTATIONS," A THEATRICAL PRESENTATION PATTERNED ON A 19TH CENTURY SPIRIT SEANCE, IS A UNIQUE HALLOWE'EN EXPERIENCE.

The Top Ten Reasons NOT to see "MANIFESTATIONS - The Ultimate Seance":

10. Poltergeists have such big egos.
9. The un-dead make me nervous.
8. I don't look good in ectoplasm.
7. Have always preferred vampires to ghosts.
6. Sitting in a dark room always gives me "the willies."
5. Don't believe in ghosts...except maybe Casper.
4. I never talk to anyone that I can see through.
3. My VCR records one program while I watch another. How can I ever expect to keep up if I leave the house.
2. Vowed long ago never to be seen in the company of spirits.
1. I'd love to go, but I just went to a séance last night.

Of course, the only reason you need to go to see MANIFESTATIONS is a desire to experience the most unique and mysterious show in town. MANIFESTATIONS, The Ultimate Seance, presents an elegant evening of spirit theatre each week in our Victorian parlour. This is the show that earns rave reviews and delights the imaginations of all who attend.

MANIFESTATIONS is the refreshing alternative to a humdrum Hallowe'en. And it's a topical and enjoyable subject of keen interest to your audience. Don't miss out on MANIFESTATIONS.

####

The Phoenix Gazette
GREEN STREAK
AFTERNOON
FINAL
Wednesday
Sept. 23, 1987
35¢

Lively spirits

Only make-believe, you remind yourself



Mike Rynearson, *The Phoenix Gazette*

Lee Earle (left) and Craig Nichols look into a crystal ball.

By Kyle Lawson
The Phoenix Gazette

The medium's voice is raspy, like an old saw cutting through hardwood. "The circle is formed. Come into the circle. Co-o-ome."

Thirteen people grasp hands around the table. At least 12 are skeptical to some degree. But all the palms are sweaty. A woman's fingers tap a nervous tattoo on her partner's wrist.

In the center of the table, a lone candle gutters in the currents from the air-conditioning. As in all old rooms, the walls creak. In the silence of the seance, conducted by Manifestations of Phoenix, these sounds take on magnitude. For some, they take on meaning.

The medium's drone becomes harsher, faster, almost hypnotic. Around the table, little gasps join in, driving the candle flame into wilder gyrations. At the windows, the drapes begin a silent dance. Malevolent shadows form between the pleats. Other shadows, cast by the candlelight, flicker across the 13 faces. Some are distorted more than others. One has an eerie grimace. Another an evil grin.

At the base of the neck, skin tightens, begins to creep. Heads turn to look behind them. A man coughs. A woman giggles, then quickly swallows the sound in the back of her throat.

The medium's voice grows loud, imperative. "We are WAITING . . . The circle is READY . . . COME!"

The room plunges into darkness.

Changed in timbre, the voice cuts through the stunned silence. "I am here. I am ready. Ask your questions."

But the questions have been asked. Guests wrote them on scraps of paper that rest in a bowl on the table. They were there when the candle went out. Without pause, without time to read them, the voice begins to answer. "Larry, you wish to know . . ." "Sarah, you are concerned about . . ."

Other voices, almost inaudible, reply in turn: "Yes . . ." "That is what I asked . . ." "Thank you . . ."

The spirit is lively. Tambourines fly around the room, jingling in this corner, then that. Bells ring. Things go bump in the dark. Behind the chairs, something moves. A ghostly touch on the shoulder. A startled intake of breath.

But all is not well. Cold air fills the room. The bumps become crashes. The medium is agitated.

See ■ Seance , D-3

■ Seance

From D-1

"Who ARE you? You are not WELCOME! Go BACK!"

The table erupts into a violent St. Vitus dance. The crystal chandelier begins a wild tinkling. The electric lights flash briefly. Pictures can be seen spinning on the walls. The drapes have gone mad.

Blackness again. A groan. The window bursts open. Glass splinters across the sidewalk. The medium collapses.

In the dim light from the street lamp, the chandelier sways back and forth . . . back and forth . . . back and forth . . .

Thus ends another night at Manifestations, surely the most unusual theatrical experience in Phoenix.

All that you've read happens. None of it is real. At least in the "spiritual" sense. Guests have experienced a re-creation of a 19th century seance, carefully researched and staged by four Valley magicians who want to "provide people with an experience they won't find anywhere else."

The seance, which lasts about two hours, is typical of those held in the parlors of believers during the Victorian era. It was a credulous age. People thought the dead could be contacted; that secrets would be revealed. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle spent much of his fortune proving it could happen. Many others spent their fortunes proving it couldn't. Most people think the skeptics won.

But, what goes around, comes around.

"We felt that, with the New Age philosophies, the business about Shirley MacLaine and all the rest of it, people were getting interested in this sort of thing once more," Lee Earle says.

Earle, who describes himself as an "experimentalist," joined Craig Nichols, Jack Sutherland and Barry Schor to form Manifestations. Seances are conducted every Thursday, with plans for weekend performances in the future. The guest list is limited to 12, with the medium making up the fateful 13. Each guest pays $25 for the experience. Reservations, at 234-3887, are a must.

"We felt this would be the ideal participatory theater," Nichols says. "Everyone has read about seances, or seen them in the movies, but very few have had a chance to be involved in one."

The quartet works its spell in an old house at 720 E. Camelback, once owned by Helen Nolte, mother of Nick, now occupied by Sutherland's Sun Magic Shop. The seance is conducted in a back room, barely large enough to contain its collection of antique furniture and occult materials and the massive circular table that is the focal point of the seance.

Each session begins at 8 p.m. Schor greets the guests and sees them comfortably settled around the table with a glass of wine close at hand. He talks a bit about the antiques and collects personal items (jewelry, credit cards, articles of clothing) to be used in the seance.

After Earle, who plays the medium, arrives, things get down to business. Stigmata are produced on the hands of guests. A music box produces a nostalgic tune, then is shown to be without any mechanism for making music. One of the wine glasses is bent like rubber.

A guest writes the names of four living friends and one dead on cards. The name of the dead person is written on another card and the card burnt. The ashes are placed in a locket. The locket is dangled over the five names. It stops above that of the dead person. The medium then takes the ashes and rubs them across another card. The name of the dead person appears.

All this is scene setting for the main attraction. "It took us a while to create the seance," Nichols says. "We did our research, then decided which things we could make believable in the room. We thought of a lot of clever things. Not all of them worked."

Those that do are quite enough. Not everyone who participates in the seance takes it for what it is — a theatrical event. One woman became hysterical. "The Devil is here," she cried. Another told Earle, "This is going beyond you — you are more psychic than you know."

Earle always is gentle, responding sensitively to the participants. "I am a skeptic, but I do not make fun of their beliefs," he says.

Still, when the lights come up, most people are laughing. They have had a good time. Their expectations have been fulfilled. As they walk into the dark night, heading for their cars, they are secure in their knowledge that such things cannot happen.

Back at the house, a faint chime is heard.

Or can they?

New Times "back page" classified advertising

•HOUDINI, phone home!• "Manifestations...the Ultimate Séance." 234-3887

I got myself **slimed** at "Manifestations... the Ultimate Séance." 234-3887

They're Heeeeere!! "Manifestations, the Ultimate Séance! " 234-3887

What's a nice GHOUL like you doing in a place like "Manifestations... the Ultimate Séance?" 234-3887

Is this any way for the **DEAD** to behave? "Manifestations, the Ultimate Séance!" 234-3887

•HALLOWE'EN...Like never before. Don't say we didn't warn you. "Manifestations, the Ultimate Séance!" 234-3887

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

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35¢

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1987 PHOENIX, ARIZONA G 98TH YEAR, NO. 178

Hunting Houdini: It's a supernatural gas

Spirited medium 'summons forth' escape master

By ANDREW MEANS
The Arizona Republic

For once the Left-Handed League is dumbfounded, stunned into silence by one of its own kind.

It is slightly past the witching hour in Phoenix, and Harry Anderson (of NBC's *Night Court)* and the illusionists of his Left-Handed League show have handed over the spotlight to others.

After high-tailing over from a Saturday night performance at the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, Anderson and friends are listening to a voice purported to be that of escape artist Harry Houdini.

Houdini, who died 50 years ago, cannot be present in the flesh, of course. Instead, the voice manifests itself through a surrogate, Lee Earle.

Holding hands to form a circle, 12 invited guests sit in complete darkness while Earle sinks into what seems to be a deep trance. After a stressful transition, Earle's timbre changes and the voice claims that it now belongs to Houdini.

Houdini's arrival is the culmination of a two-hour "evening of spirit theater" presented on Fridays and Saturdays in a specially customized house at 720 E. Camelback — a house that by coincidence once was the home of actor Nick Nolte.

The event is the brainchild of four men — Craig Nichols, Jack Sutherland, Lee Earle and Barry Schor — who set out earlier this year to re-create the atmosphere of a turn-of-the-century seance. They began business in June under the name Manifestations, using a back room in Jack Sutherland's Sun Magic Shop, and since then have performed regularly for the public as well as for private groups. (For more information, call 234-3887. Tickets are $25.)

Earle, who takes the part of the medium, and Schor, the butler, do not claim that any genuine psychic phenomena take place during their sittings. All the same, they say it is not unknown for participants to feel that supernatural forces really are present. It is good business, of course, for them not to deny that possibility too strenuously.

Participants — and it is an event that demands participation — are greeted at the door by Schor, who invites them into a cramped room crammed with atmosphere-enhancing artifacts. A book about Tarot cards sits within reach of the round table. From a photograph above the mantle piece, Houdini gazes down on a pentagram spread out on the tablecloth. On another wall are sets of handcuffs which, Earle later explains, Houdini used during his career.

Like a good butler, Schor passes around the wine and sets the scene by commenting on how seances were the home entertainment of the Victorian era and how actress Shirley MacLaine has helped to revive interest in the subject.

Other preliminaries include writing out questions for Houdini to answer and placing a personal item in a basket from which Earle will divine.

When the 12 guests are seated, the medium enters the room. He begins with a small, but convincing, demonstration involving the wrapping foil from a chocolate "kiss." After screwing the foil into a ball, he places it into the hand of one in the assembly. He then "wills" it to get hot, which it does. I know that from personal experience.

More striking still is the medium's ability to select personal items from the tray and return them to their owners along with some insights into character. Earle managed 10 out of 12 correct returns — a performance that stands up well against many mediums who claim supernatural help.

Some of his comments about character left an impression, too. One woman forbade me to print his remarks as applied to her.

Houdini's spirit is courted reverently. Earle displays two photographs of Houdini in later life, pictures he says that have not been published. Then he recounts episodes of the great man's life: his attempts to debunk the mediums of his day; his death in 1926 at age 52, the result of a premature punch received in a dare; the pact with his wife that he would try to return from beyond the veil and, if he succeeded, would use a coded message to establish his identity; and the medium who surreptitiously obtained that password from someone who overheard the Houdinis talking, and who tried to use it deceptively.

When Earle finally produces Houdini, he turns out to be a crusty old so-and-so. But his powers apparently have not been diminished by death.

In the darkness I listen while Earle/Houdini paraphrases the question I wrote down before the seance started and now is on a piece of paper tucked into my inside pocket.

Remembering a trick performed earlier at the Scottsdale Center for the Arts, I had written: "How does Harry Anderson lift the table during his show?"

"Would one illusionist reveal the techniques of another?" I had wondered. I should have known better. After quoting the question, Houdini laughs in my face. Professional loyalties, it seems, do survive the grave.



Clockwise around the table: Turk Pipkin (wearing hat), Barry Schor (standing), Chuck Kirshner, a Left-Handed League technician, Craig Nichols, Mike Caveny, Tina Lenert, Harry Anderson (standing), Martin Lewis, Andrew Means (reviewing reporter), Mr. Means' companion, Jay Johnson

David Petkiewicz/The Arizona Republic

Harry Anderson, standing at right, digs through his pockets for a personal item to be used during the seance.

Events/ Review

MANIFESTATIONS
Friday and Saturday nights at 720 E. Camelback. Tickets: $25 per person. Phone: 234-3887.

Hocus pocus

Spirits from beyond summon up some wild manifestations

By TOD McCOY
State Press

"The spirits will, in the absence of skepticism, make their presence known!" booms the loud voice of the host, the man conducting the seance.

He appears as if he has stepped straight out of a Dickens' novel, looking comfortable in his three-piece pinstripe suit and his handlebar mustache with the twirled ends. His fedora hangs near the door.

Producing a piece of paper, he draws the outline of a left hand and, holding it up, drills a burning stick of incense through it.

Having charred a small hole in the paper, he politely asks a young Filipino lady attending the session to remove a silk scarf which had been wrapped around her hand. As she slowly unclenches her fist, a mysterious black spot is revealed — one which had not been there when the host originally wrapped it up.

"We must remove the stigmata, for they have been known to bleed," he states as he rubs the spot from the hand of the astonished woman.

This is one of the many incantations invoked by Lee Earle, the medium of the theatrical production known as "Manifestations," a fairly authentic reproduction of the seance once so popular in the 19th century.

"Manifestations" is the brainchild of Earle and Craig Nichols, who began their supernatural show last June as "something fun to do."

The show runs every Friday and Saturday night in an old house located at 720 E. Camelback Road in Phoenix, in the back room of Sutherland's Sun Magic Shop.

But the superstitious should take heart, for this is not an actual seance nor is intended to summon any spirit — malignant or benign.

At least, they're not *supposed* to.

"One of the things we don't do is sell the show as real," said Craig Nichols, one of the founders of the show. "At the beginning of the show, the butler (Barry Schor) makes a disclaimer stating that (this is only a show). We make it very clear that it is not real."

Being a special effects man for magicians like Doug Henning and Harry Anderson, Nichols was able to create some very authentic tricks, ranging from guessing the names of dead people with a swinging pendant, to heating up a piece of tin foil in a participant's hand, simply by the stare of Earle.

"We tried a lot of different things that didn't work" and ironed out the details, Nichols said. "The present show is much different than the original one, because Nichols and Earle try many new things and drop others. Everyone who attends the show may see different things, even though everyone hears the same things."



Host Lee Earle, standing, presides over a group of people exploring the other world of Manifestations.

In keeping with the Victorian era, pictures of Harry Houdini adorn the room, hanging on red-wallpapered walls and nestled among bookshelves, antique furniture, an old (yet modernized) Victrola and displays of handcuffs which once belonged to the infamous escapist. A white tablecloth covers the large, round table on which lies a chain formed into the shape of a pentagram.

The purpose of the "seance" is to summon the spirit of Harry Houdini, who, by ironic contradiction, spent the later part of his years exposing psychics and busting up seances.

Earle and his associates (Nichols, Schor and Jack Sutherland) build up to the seance by 'proving' the existence of said spirits and psychic phenomena by displaying a number of "tricks" to knock down the walls of disbelief — like bending a wine glass in his hands.

"People think it's all a bunch of tricks," Nichols said, "but I want the things that happen to be a little more subtle."

Although it is dubbed "an evening of spiritual theater," the presentation is more than just a stage show, Nichols explained. Because there are only 12 people who attend the session at a time, the show is lowered to a more intimate level in which everyone is involved.

The atmosphere is terse with excitement as the seance begins, and only a candle lights up the room as Earle asks everyone to touch the pentagram and grip the hand of the person to their right.

"Harry Houdini!" Earle's head tilts back as he calls out, his voice deepening and changing into a bemoaned wail. "Harry Houdini! Give us a sign!"

A piece of crystal falls from the chandelier overhead.

Grips tighten up as he snuffs the candle out, pitching the room into cool darkness.

"Houdini! Are you here?" he calls out again, now in a deep voice, which sounds almost hoarse. "Wait," he whispers, "I feel something! Come Houdini! Come! Use this body! Use this body and speak to us!"

And he does. Within the next 20 or 30 minutes of chaos, strange objects fly about the room, tambourines fly (the spirits love things like that), the chandelier shakes and the pictures spin on the wall as the ghost of Houdini makes himself heard. He answers questions, too.

So go, if you dare.

And if you think you see something glowing faintly several feet off the floor, or something cold and clammy touches the back of your neck, look carefully. It may *not* be your imagination — Or theirs.

The cost for "Manifestations" is $25 per person and attendance is by reservation only at 234-3887.

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Tempe, Arizona
Friday, December 4, 1987
Arizona State University's Morning Daily



photo by Jon Gipe

Skull session: Craig Nichols and Lee Earle of Manifestations raise a ghost.

AND NOW, COMING DIRECT TO YOU FROM THE GREAT BEYOND . . .

Harry Houdini's fans will be glad to hear he's making a bit of a comeback. The world-famous magician, who died on Halloween in 1926, has recently established residency in uptown Phoenix, and not because of all the neat bars there.

Houdini's ghost is booked for an indefinite run as the star of a new attraction called "Manifestations," which is billing itself as "The Ultimate Séance." Since June, a dozen strangers have been gathering every Thursday night in a back room of Sun Magic (720 East Camelback) to hold hands and conjure up spooks. Tickets are $25 each.

Two local magicians—Craig Nichols and Lee Earle—are the brains (and quicker-than-the-eye hands) behind this ethereal enterprise, and they're hoping their brand of "spirit theatre" will continue to scare up paying customers. "Almost everybody's been to Disney's Haunted Mansion," says Earle, the 42-year-old "medium" who conducts the cryptic journeys. "We do the things that Disney didn't dare."

Actually, the show Nichols and Earle present is based on a bizarre chapter in pop-culture history. Similar séances once were the rage of Victorian-era parlors. So-called mediums conducted home shows (for a fee, naturally), contacting spirits that supposedly caused bumps in the night from beyond the grave. Glow-in-the-dark objects would float around, odd voices would moan and a customer or two would get squirted with ectoplasm (the "slime" recently made infamous by Ghostbuster Bill Murray). For pre-ESPN Victorians, this was barn-burning stuff. Of course, it was all fake.

But profiteering mediums often managed to dupe even the intellectual elite of their time (Sherlock Holmes creator Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, was said to be an avid séancegoer). The most vocal opponent of hereafter-hucksterism was no less than Harry Houdini himself, who spent the last several years of his career debunking cash-and-carry spiritualism.

Hence the tongue-in-cheek Houdini tie-in at "Manifestations." Rare photos of the master illusionist adorn the red walls of the séance room, and a collection of handcuffs is prominently displayed. (Houdini's career as an escape artist supposedly began when he saw a medium use a set of trick handcuffs to "prove" he wasn't causing a ghostly ruckus.) Earle says the Phoenix cuffs are from Houdini's personal collection.

And it is Houdini whom Earle calls upon to be master of cosmic ceremonies for each séance. No one gets slimed during the two-hour festivities, but enough whimsical hell apparently is raised to satisfy even the most skeptical participant.

"We're not claiming that we cause any supernatural occurrences," says Nichols, age 23, who by day runs a mail-order magic business. "We're aiming to keep the séance right down the middle, away from any psychobabble." Says Earle, who during the show uses Victorian-era methods bolstered by contemporary technology: "We do want to give [participants] a real good ride."

One early customer was so shaken by her "Manifestation" séance experience that Earle and his partner had to talk her down over a cup of coffee at a nearby diner. The men say they are careful not to plant too much of a mystical seed in the minds of their guests. At the same time, they believe that even the most committed new-age metaphysicians would be satisfied by the rehearsed intensity of the experience.

"When people walk away believing what they see, it means I've done my job as an actor and a technician," Earle says. "I'll guarantee you'll remember what happens in this room until the day you die."—**Dave Walker**

Volume 18
Number 36
Phoenix, Arizona
September 2-8, 1987

New Times

The Valley's News and Arts Journal

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
Life & Leisure

Where have all the children gone?
Alvin and Pee-Wee are still drawing good audiences, but the days of 6 million tykes watching any Saturday morning children's series now seem to be gone. **F3.**

Sunday, October 25, 1987

Gail Tabor	F2
Fair calendar	F4
James E. Cook	F6
On the side	F8
Weddings	F18
Ginger Hutton	F19

F

HAUNT COUTURE



Expert divulges ideas for staging a chilling séance

By HOLLY D. REMY
The Arizona Republic

Late last spring, Phoenix magicians Craig Nichols and Lee Earle decided to re-create as theater entertainment a Victorian séance that would conjure the spirit of Harry Houdini, who died on Halloween in 1926.

The challenge was obvious: The séance had to give the illusion of scaring up ghosts if it was to scare the wits out of theater patrons.

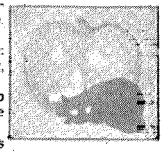
The result is *Manifestations*, which plays to a house of 12 on Friday and Saturday nights at 720 E. Camelback, behind Sun Magic.

Nichols nixed mainstay tricks of kids' Halloween parties and studied accounts of real Victorian séances.

"Personally, I've never gone in for reaching into bowls and being told that grapes are eyeballs and spaghetti is brains," he said.

Instead, he made pictures spin on the walls, a ghost fly though the room and things go bump in the dark.

"I took 2½ months on that room, and I really had it rigged," Nichols said. "At home, someone might not want to drill holes in the walls or run wiring to get the same effects."



He suggests a simpler séance for an evening at home. Here is how he would do it:

- Try to affect every sense: sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste.
- Black out the windows so no light seeps into the séance room.
- "When the medium is first seen, you would see only a silhouette of him — his crooked hat and his cane. That's the way you first see the exorcist in *The Exorcist*."
- Light the room with a single candle in the center of the séance table.
- "Table-tipping was popular at the turn of the century. The people seated at the table put their hands on the edge. If they believed the table would tip, it would tip."
- Make the house look old, as if it has been abandoned. Cover the furniture with sheets, the way it might be in an abandoned house. Get cobwebs at a fun shop and stretch them throughout the room. Decorate with spooky props, like antiques, bones, skull replicas. Tambourines and bells were spirit-calling items at Victorian séances.
- Burn incense for an unusual smell.
- Consider having somebody stand behind the table to touch people lightly on the shoulder or back occasionally from time to time.

The séance goes like this:

- Everyone holds hands around the table.
- Everyone breathes rhythmically in unison.
- One person takes over, probably the host. This person has in mind whose spirit will be raised and calls for the spirit to manifest itself.
- The "spirit" snuffs the candle.
- Everyone puts his or her hands on the table and calls for the spirit to move the table. Watch what happens.
- The medium continues calling the spirit, waiting for people to see and hear spooky things.

"Go for a little longer than you think necessary," Nichols said. "The host will have his or her mind on lots of other things, but the guests will be experiencing the séance.

"Remember that people tend to see things and feel things in the dark that aren't there."



An Evening of Spirit Theatre

Please rate our seance on the following:

	good				poor
Entertainment	1	2	3	4	5
authenticity	1	2	3	4	5
believability	1	2	3	4	5
surprises	1	2	3	4	5
Houdini theme	1	2	3	4	5
hors d'ouvers	1	2	3	4	5
the Dark séance	1	2	3	4	5
ambience (atmosphere)	1	2	3	4	5
length	1	2	3	4	5

Was anything in the seance: ___Too uncomfortable ___Too scary ___Too "hokey"

What was the best part of the séance (the part you'll tell your friends about)?

Which portion of the show was your least favorite? Why?

Was the Medium believable? The Butler?

Would you recommend this event to your friends? ___Yes ___No

Do you believe in: ___spirit phenomena; ___Extra Sensory Perception ___Psychics

What is a reasonable charge for a seat at the séance? $10 $20 $30 $40 $50 Other

Is there any other way we can improve our seance?

716 East Camelback Road, Phoenix, Arizona 85014 (602) 234-3887
Entrance located at 720 E. Camelback (rear of building)



An Evening of Spirit Theatre

December 19, 1988

Mr. Jason Stein
1082 W. State Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85051

Dear Mr. Stein:

Thank you for your interest in Manifestations. I am quite certain that you will enjoy our show - especially if you have grown tired of the standard entertainment fare. The Phoenix Gazette has praised Manifestations, calling it "the most unusual theatrical experience in Phoenix!"

Manifestations involves the audience; they are a part of each performance. The show is mysterious, up-beat, and trendy. But most of all, Manifestations is fun. The Mesa Tribune calls it "an evening not soon to be forgotten."

We have public shows each weekend and we're available for charter groups throughout the week.

I have included some more information about Manifestations for your review. Please call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Craig Nichols
Producer

716 East Camelback Road, Phoenix, Arizona 85014 (602) 234-3887
Entrance located at 720 E. Camelback (rear of building)



An Evening of Spirit Theatre

WHAT IS IT? Manifestations is an authentic re-creation of a turn of the century Spirit Seance. Guests form the Circle of Twelve at a lace covered round table set within a Victorian parlour.

WHAT HAPPENS? The Seance is divided into two parts; the Light Seance and the Dark Seance. During the fully illuminated Light Seance, each guest receives a psychometric reading and participates in various psychic tests and experiments. Once the Circle is balanced, the Dark Seance begins: In absolute blackness, the spirit of a famous Victorian personality is contacted, answering questions unspoken by the guests. Quite often even visual apparitions are materialized.

IS IT REAL? Because Manifestations is advertised as a theatrical production, we make no claims as to the validity of phenomena witnessed. We ask that you bring an open mind and be prepared to enjoy the experience.

WHO IS THE MEDIUM? Our Seance Medium for each sitting is Mr. Lee Earle. Mr. Earle is not only a subscriber to the Omega Code of Ethics but also a member of the Psychic Entertainers Association, adhering to their strict Standards and Practices. Mr Earle has been presenting informal, private seances since 1964.

MUST WE HAVE TWELVE PEOPLE TO ATTEND? No. Groups, couples, and individuals may reserve seats for any scheduled Seance. Special arrangements can be made for groups.

HOW LONG DOES IT LAST? While each sitting will vary somewhat due to questions, responses, and reactions, most presentations run about two hours.

WHAT IS THE PRICE? Seats at the Seance are $25.00 per person; major credit cards, checks, and cash are welcome. Reservations are required. Our phone number is 234-3887. Special prices may apply for private groups.

WHERE IS MANIFESTATIONS PRESENTED? We are conveniently located at 720 East Camelback Road, at the north corner of 8th Street. The entrance is on the North side of the building. Park in our large, lighted and paved lot, also on the North side of the building. Enter through the wrought iron gate set into the ivy covered brick wall.

716 East Camelback Road, Phoenix, Arizona 85014 (602) 234-3887
Entrance located at 720 E. Camelback (rear of building)



An Evening of Spirit Theatre

CONGRATULATIONS!

You're the winner of a special prize package presented by Y95 Radio!

Your prize is a pair of $25.00 tickets to Manifestiations, the Ultimate Séance.

Manifestations presents an elegant evening of Spirit Theatre six times each week in our Victorian parlour. This is the show that earns rave reviews and delights the imaginations of all who attend. And best of all, Manifestations is the refreshing alternative to a humdrum Hallowe'en.

Seating is limited and reservations are required. Please call us at 234-3887 and make your reservations soon. Available seating is filling up fast.

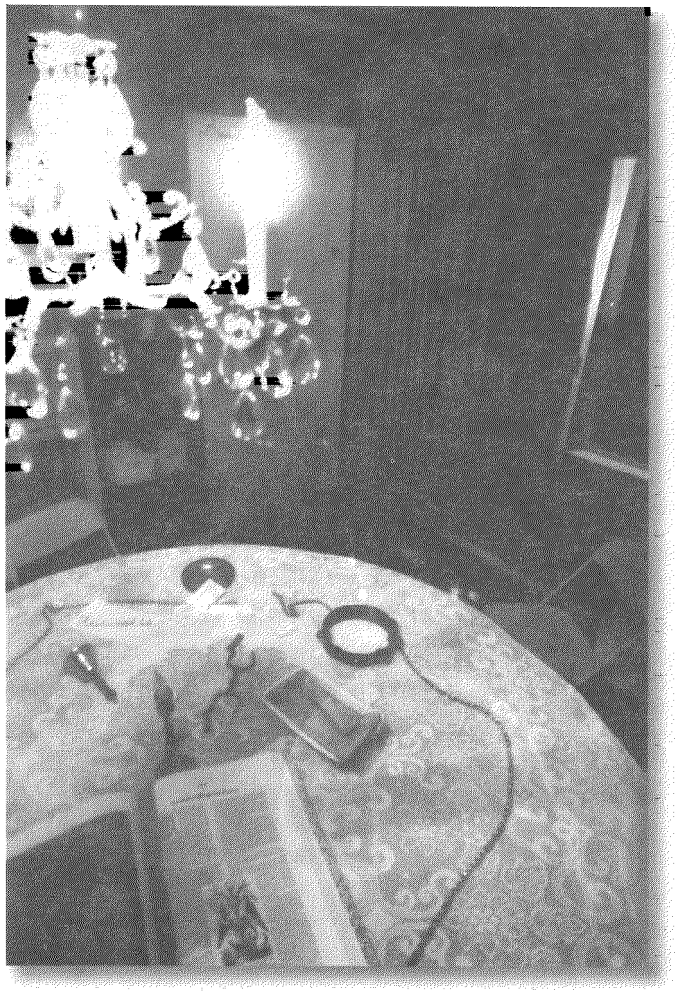
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Entrance located at 720 E. Camelback (rear of building)

The Beginning...



Lee Earle and Craig Nichols, seated in what was to become the room in which **Manifestations – the Ultimate Séance** would be held. Surrounded with all the effluvia common to the back rooms of magic shops everywhere, we began our cooperative brainstorming on the very day this photo was taken. Despite my sweatshirt's subliminal message, we were determined that ours would never be a "Mickey Mouse" operation.

...and The End



Taken at the conclusion of the final séance, on the last day of our nearly three year run, this photo shows the props from the performance strewn about the table. Visible are the tambourine, the ashtray, the bell, the knotted candle, the open handcuffs, the book, the 'stigmata' paper, the Minor Circle chain, the Rosabelle paper, and the napkin-lined basket.

The window, still open after the malevolent spirit's departure, can be seen in the background, right.

I've thoroughly enjoyed assembling this reminiscent retrospective. While there is reason to assume that time has colored the memories, there's little doubt **Manifestations – the Ultimate Séance** was one helluva show.